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Hints on the regulation of
Christian churches adapted



HINTS
ON THE REGULATION OF
CHRISTIAN CHURCHES.

H I N T S

ON THE REGULATION OF

CHRISTIAN CHURCHES,

ADAPTED TO THE PRESENT STATE OF THEIR
AFFAIRS.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

REMARKS ON THE VOLUNTARY SYSTEM,
CONSIDERED IN RELATION TO ITS SPIRITUAL IMPORTANCE.

BY THE REV. C. STOVEL.

“ Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy
palaces.”

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P R E F A C E.



THE remarks contained in the following sheets, are all founded on one truth, which is used throughout as an axiom. By Lord Bacon, it was applied to the subjects of general learning, here an attempt is made to apply it to the government of a Christian church. The Bible is thus placed before a Christian in a church, as the whole physical universe is presented to a student in the world. The object of Bacon, was to guide his pupil in studying present existences, and hence, the form of his axiom.

“ Man is a minister, and an interpreter of nature, and nothing more.” The object of this work, is to guide the Christian in studying the will of God as it respects the government of his church. The axiom assumed, therefore, is, that man is the disciple and servant of God, and nothing more. As in nature he cannot make facts, or general principles, but only learn and use them; so in the church a Christian cannot make laws: his whole business is to understand and obey them. The first few pages are occupied in explaining this principle, the remainder of the treatise is employed in its application to particular points of practice. In order to shorten the work, very few passages of Scripture are introduced in full. To make up for this, the quotations are arranged so as

to facilitate their study. The reader will, therefore, be kind enough to peruse them in the order in which the references stand in the margin. The whole was drawn up at the request of friends, for whom the Writer entertained the highest esteem. If anything useful should be found in the work, let the praise be given to the Author of our redemption; the defects must be attributed to the imperfection of him to whom the duty has been assigned.

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CHAP. I.

ON THE UNIVERSALITY AND GENERAL CLASSIFICATION OF DIVINE LAW.

THE two great principles which distinguish the Christian church, are, first, its spirituality; and, secondly, the voluntary nature of its constitution. By these it is distinguished from the world; for in it, every privilege is claimed, and every hope cherished, not on the ground of a natural birth, or for the sake of earthly blessings; but, on the ground of the new birth, and for the sake of blessings which are heavenly and everlasting.

The church of Christ, therefore, is an association of converted men. Their fellowship relates to the exercises and interests of their

souls, not of their bodies. They are influenced by considerations which determine their individual choice. Each member acts the part of a rational and voluntary agent. He willingly gives himself, and whatever else he has to give; first to the Lord, and then to his people: every thing presented or performed, being, in reality, an offering, a grateful sacrifice to the Lord. Uninfluenced by this principle no service is enforced, or even acceptable; for God looketh at the heart. God, therefore, has given his church no authoritative or compulsory power. Her glory is her freedom: the liberty wherewith Christ has made her free.

This liberty extends, not only to the church considered as a body separate from the world; but, also, to the several parts of it. Every separate church is as free from the authority of any other church, as the universal church is free from worldly government; and every individual member possesses the same freedom which is granted to the whole. But this gracious blessing is not intended to form an occasion for the flesh, or to diminish the force of moral duties. The church, and every individual in it, has a right to be freed from all human thralldom: but not from divine authority.

God has made all things for himself, that the

whole universe may show forth his praise. Hence, every part of it is subjected to his will. The will of God, therefore, in what way soever he makes it known, is law to all creation. Our conception of divine law must not be confined even to its influence over the human race. The creatures above, and those which are, by the constitution of their nature, beneath mankind, are all thereby subjected to the will of their Creator. The things which have neither life nor reason are by no means exempt, for the inevitable necessity of physical causes and effects, is an ordinance of God. He spread the heavens abroad like the covering of a tent; and gave the orbs of night and day their places, their motions, and their magnitudes. He laid the foundations of the earth; formed the bed for the mighty waters; piled the dreadful mountain to the skies; and gave its beauteous transparency to every chrysalis that is comprehended in its substances. It is God who devised and executed the structure of every plant; and painted every flower. The animals received their forms, their life, and all their various capabilities from him. He lifted man from the dust to the dignified station he holds in the order of existence; and endowed him with a rational spirit. The angels received their being

from him: and by him their being is preserved. The whole of this vast universe, formed by his wisdom, and upheld by his power, is regulated also by his governance. Causation itself is nothing but his ordinance, and could never proceed without his presence. But every thing is governed by laws adapted to its own nature. The earth and heavens he rules by the laws of matter and motion; the plants, and trees, by the laws of vegetable life; the animals, by the laws of animal life, and instinct; he governs man, by reason, conscience, and the written law; whilst the angels do his pleasure, hearkening to the *voice* of his word. Nothing is exempted. The seraph, and the insect, must both obey. And, however free the church may be made from any earthly power; to God it must be subject: for all its business is to do and teach his will.

It is also observable, that all the best blessings of the creature, have proceeded from an exact observance of divine law. Thus, the perfection observable in many parts of creation, is constantly produced. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth forth his handy works;” simply, because in them we see uninterrupted obedience to the law of God. All the spangled mystery moves,

and still shall move, just in the orbits which he has described, without one single deviation; and hence, their movements never clash, and the forces which propel them bring no destruction. It is just the same with things most perfect on the earth. The chrystal, which is most clear, derives its brilliancy from the perfect execution of divine law. The cause of vegetation proceeds by the same rule. Every flower opens its beauteous form, displays its colour, sheds its fragrance, and prepares its fruitfulness, by the law which the Creator has decreed; and all the art of vegetable cultivation, consists in the discovery and the observance of his will. The same thing is seen in the animal kingdom. All that tender affection, and perfect arrangement which is made, for the preservation of the young; all the beauty and perfection, observable in the structure and use of their organs; result entirely from the perfect law of God: which is never broken, in this department, but by force. It is equally true that all the angels in heaven are subject to the Creator. Though great in might, they hasten to do his will; hearkening to the voice of his word. Their felicity is thus secure. God has devised the best things for their condition: and

his law is the rule, by which the enjoyment of the best things may be perfected.

The contrary is equally true. Wherever misery or ruin exists, it results from the violation of God's law. If even a flower fade, before its fruit has been produced, we know that at some point the determined order of vegetation has been deranged. Its support has been withheld, or its structure has been injured. If any creature be enfeebled, or in pain, it is because the ordinance of God has been imperfectly observed. It is the same in every part of human affairs. The afflictions of man, result entirely from his sin. God has ordained the best for him, as well as for every other creature, and his law is the rule for its attainment. The law of God, therefore, whether it relate to body, or soul, is expediency, determined by infinite wisdom; and, unless there be a wisdom greater than that which is infinite, the arrangements of God never can be altered, without injuring his creatures, by diminishing the benefits intended for their enjoyment, or producing evils which they were never intended to endure. Accordingly, we find that every deviation from the will of God, is productive of incalculable misery. The rules of health being broken, disease becomes inevitable. The laws of virtue

being broken, or neglected, the misery of crime is at once entailed; nor is the painful effect peculiar to any condition. The same cause has produced the loss of paradise, and the bitterness of final despair: the shame of individuals, and the ruin of empires. One eternal, immutable, universal decree, has been sent forth by the Omnipotent; that every creature shall be subject to himself, and that in their complete subjection, they shall enjoy the riches of his goodness: but, that misery and ruin shall, every where, result from the violation of his law.

This, universal law of God, includes all things, temporal and spiritual; and eternity as well as time. Its influence may be most distinctly traced in human affairs. Whatever man has, of comfort and joy, remaining in his portion, is preserved by the providence and law of God. On the other hand, all his bodily afflictions, the stings of conscience, the disorders of society, the necessity and pain of death; with all the darkened gulph of endless misery before him; proceed from the vengeance or correction of God: and are wholly occasioned by the violation of divine law.

It may also be added, that the appointments of Omnipotence can only be revoked by the Omnipotent himself; the punishment of sin, there-

fore, can only be remitted by God himself who has ordained it; and the evils of sin can be cured by no other hand. The cure of these evils, and the remission of this punishment, are comprehended in his work of mercy. This work of mercy is revealed in the gospel, and there alone; for there is no other name given under heaven, by which men can be saved, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified. The gospel, therefore, is the law of divine mercy to mankind. It tells us how that mercy was procured; in what way it may be enjoyed; and the use to which it must be appropriated. The whole law of God, therefore, may be divided into several departments.

The laws of nature,

The laws of providence,

The laws of righteousness, and

The laws of mercy.

CHAP. II.

ON THE LAW WHICH REGULATES THE BESTOW-
MENT OF DIVINE MERCY.

In every one of these departments, man is the disciple and servant of his Maker, and nothing more. His whole business is to understand and obey his will. It is of no importance whether the law be written on the face of nature, in the mysteries of providence, in the books of Moses, or in the gospel of Christ; its end and the mode of its declaration may be different, but its authority is the same.

By attending to the three former, an innocent man must be happy, for those laws include all that relates to his body or soul, in time, or in eternity; and they secure his felicity, from the fulness, and the power of God himself. But, obedience to the law of mercy, is the only way, in which, when fallen and sinful, he can be restored to happiness and purity. It is the way in which God himself has determined, to repair the ruins of human nature.

This law of mercy began to be declared immediately after man began to sin. It was opened

still more clearly, through all the advances of the Old Testament dispensation. But, it was not perfectly revealed, until after the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Before then, the great work of mercy was hid in God ; but since that event, God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts, causing the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, to appear in the face of Jesus Christ. It is to him, therefore, we must look for the law of mercy ; both in respect to the mode of its exercise, the rule of its appropriation, and the objects to which the inheritance of divine mercy shall be devoted.

1. The law of mercy, includes, the means, by which, that mercy can be exercised for sinners. It appoints the person of the Saviour, a being in whom the divine and human natures are united. It ordains his work : to magnify the law, by obeying it, and suffering its penalties. It provides for his acceptance in the work of mediation before the throne of God ; and it secures the proof of his acceptance, in his resurrection from the dead, and the proclamation of his forgiveness to mankind. He is thus presented to the world, able to save unto the uttermost, all those who come unto God by him : and becomes authoritatively, the only way

in which the mercy of God can find a passage down to earth, and fallen man obtain admission to the bliss of heaven.

2. The same law appointed the rule, by which mercy may be appropriated. It is restricted to no class, whatever ; but the word of God defines clearly, the act of appropriation. It excludes none from its blessings ; but, it will not be trifled with by any one. It is a law, and it must be obeyed : every man, therefore, must believe for himself. His faith, moreover, must include a change of heart ; he must be a new creature, or he cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. John iii. 13—22, 5, 6, 35, 36.

3. The law of mercy regulates the use of this divine inheritance. When a man has become a new creature, and tasted that the Lord is gracious ; he is required to use that blessing for God's glory, and the good of other souls, in danger like himself. From that moment he is made to acknowledge, that he is not his own ; but his, who loved him, and gave himself for him. If, therefore, he enjoy the blessing of divine favour himself ; the believer is compelled to use it to the honour of God, from whom the mercy is received. "Ye are not your own : therefore, glorify God in your bodies and your spirits which are God's." Rom. xii. 1, 2. I. Cor. iv. 19, 20. iii. 21—23. x. 24—33.

The whole man is thus regarded as a redeemed slave or captive. He has a double ground of obligation. First: as a creature, he is subjected to the law of nature, providence, and righteousness: secondly, as a redeemed creature, he is subjected to the law of grace, and mercy. By the first, he deserved to have perished: by the second, having been redeemed from the curse, in the use of his redeemed life, he is still led by infinite wisdom, and subjected to divine authority.

CHAP. III.

DEFINITE OBJECTS TO BE SOUGHT IN THE USE OF DIVINE MERCY.

In using the blessings of mercy, three objects are appointed by our heavenly Father, to be kept continually in view.

1. The cultivation of individual piety.
2. The advancement of Christian fellowship.
3. The conversion of those who have not obtained forgiveness.

1. The cultivation of individual piety, is not only implied in the positive precept, "be ye holy, for I am holy:" but, the obligation is also implied in the general expressions, by which, the privilege and character of Christians, are described. They are followers of God, as dear children: in whom a filial obedience is required. They are to be the guests at the marriage supper of the Lamb: and, therefore, to be adorned in the wedding garments of perfect purity. They are to see the Lord as he is, and to enjoy his society for ever; and those who have this hope in them, purify themselves, even as he is pure. The conversion of their souls to God, is only the beginning of their mighty work; in which, the remainder of their existence is to be spent; and the noblest ambition of their spirits to be employed. It is the very characteristic, of the good man, to fix the warmest desires of his heart on this object; and to derive his highest enjoyment from its attainment. Every imperfection, or impediment, is a diminution of his joy. "Then," and then only, "shall I be satisfied, when I awake having thy likeness." I. Pet. ii. 7—25. Matth. v. 20. chap. v. vi. and vii. Phil. iv. 4—10.

2. The rich provisions of mercy, are not to be entirely expended on ourselves. That por-

tion which falls to the lot of each saint, first, is to be used for his own improvement, and comfort ; and, secondly, for the improvement and comfort of others. By using the mercy of God, in promoting the improvement and comfort of fellow Christians ; Christian fellowship is produced. This is fully implied in the many commands which are given them ; “ to love one another :” “ to bear each other’s burdens : to sympathize in each other’s sorrows and joys ; and, in fine, to consider each one as a member of the whole body, joined to one Head, animated by one Spirit, and involved in one vast and all absorbing interest. It is not a mere matter of choice ; they are bound to share in the common solitudes, dangers, labours, or advantages of the saints : and thus, to have fellowship one with another. John xiii. 34. I. John iv. 20, 21. John xiii. 1—17.

3. The conversion of sinners is a further object ; in promoting which, the blessings of mercy are to be employed. For the gifts of divine grace to a fallen world, though originally the peculiar acts of God, are now committed to his servants. The Bible, with all its promises, derived their *existence* from the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, but their *diffusion* is consigned to the church. Every one who obtains for-

giveness, is bound also to state his own deliverance, in confirmation of the promise given to all, and as an encouragement to all by whom it is known, to trust it for themselves : nor is there anything to restrain the effort, or to limit the indulgence of the largest benevolence ; excepting the capabilities of man. This command, therefore, was given to all his servants ; go ye out into all the world, and preach the glad tidings of mercy to every creature. And, though every man may not be able to do it in the same way, and to the same extent ; yet, each one is bound to make known the gospel, in the best way that he is able : and to the farthest possible extent. Matth. xii. 30.

CHAP. IV.

THE METHOD OF SECURING THE OBJECTS OF DIVINE MERCY.

The objects of divine mercy may be pursued in two ways.

1. By individual.
2. By united exertions.

1. The individual exertions, consist in the attempts of private persons ; either to cultivate piety in their own hearts, or to unite and comfort other Christians, by instruction, or other means : or, finally, to lead sinners to repentance. In either, or all of these pursuits, a man may be left a solitary labourer ; bearing his toils, and redeeming his responsibilities alone. Acts viii. 4, 5. xviii. 24—28.

2. In united exertions, a number of individuals, combine their strength and their resources for the same end. They act in concert : each labouring to advance the common design. They watch over each other in love ; and render, by every possible means, assistance in advancing personal piety. They employ all their collective wisdom, and strength, in rendering the exercises of devotion, influential upon every heart. They unite in seeking opportunities for mingling the results of their mutual experience, and for diffusing through their circle, the riches of redeeming grace : and thus, they have fellowship one with another. The means which they employ to arrest the attention of vain and wicked men, and bring them to God, are more extensive and efficient. They form, therefore, a society for the culture of personal piety, and Christian fellowship : and for enlarging the kingdom of heaven.

CHAP. V.

THE NAME AND CONSTITUTION OF THE
CHURCH.

This society of converted men, united for spiritual purposes ; is called in Greek, ecclesia ; in German, it is called a kirche ; from which word is taken the English word church. The individual, is called a Christian man, because he is guided, both in the attainment and the use of mercy, by the laws of our Lord Jesus Christ. The church is called a Christian church, because it is redeemed by the blood of Christ, governed by the law of Christ, and formed for his praise.

The constitution of this church, was designed by our Lord, before the foundation of the world. The revelation of this design, was began and advanced through all the Old Testament dispensations ; but, it was never perfectly made known, until Christ himself came, and laid the foundation of it in his own blood. Then, after he had shown by the sufferings of Gethsemane and the cross, the love which he bore for his people ; he gave to them the laws of his king-

dom ; and, whilst he rose to intercede for them in heaven, left his people to perform his will on earth.

CHAP. VI.

ON THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SAVIOUR'S WILL.

The will of the Saviour was made known to his people in two ways.

1. By positive precept.
2. By imperative example.

1. The positive precepts of our Lord were given, either directly from his own lip ; or, indirectly through the inspiration of his servants. The precepts he delivered from his own lip, are many, and beautiful ; and, may be collected, principally, from his discourses recorded in the four evangelists. The precepts which he gave indirectly, through the inspiration of his servants ; are, for the most part, preserved in the acts of the apostles, and the epistles. All these, though they are not spoken directly by Jesus,

are, nevertheless, of just the same force as though they had been; because the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, was his own gift: and it rendered his servants infallible, in all that they declared in his name. Both together, therefore, form a body of divine law, positively expressed, to guide his servants in performing the duties of their stations, and in promoting the interests of his kingdom.

These positive laws of our blessed Lord, may, for the sake of distinction, be divided into two classes. In one, he positively enjoins a particular duty; in the other, he positively forbids a particular sin. Thus, in his own discourses, and also by the lips of his inspired servants, the Lord has been pleased to give both positive injunctions and positive prohibitions, in order that we may not mistake his will.

2. The imperative examples, by which the will of our Lord is expressed, are of two kinds. The first are found in his own life: the second, are given in the lives of his inspired servants. His own life, therefore, must be studied with the utmost care; because, as he came in the form of a servant, and performed the will of God for us in that character: his actions are the best guide we have. He tells his servants plainly: "I have set you an example that ye

should follow in my steps." The apostle Paul affirms, that the saints are predestinated, to be conformed into his image. But, besides his own example, the inspiration of his servants, rendered them infallible guides in all things wherein they act in the name of the Lord; for, at such times, they always speak his will and do his pleasure. Hence, the will of Christ, may often be known from his own example, or from that of his servants: even when it has never been stated in a positive command.

The only difficulty in using the precedents of Scripture, is, in finding out whether they apply to the case in question. It will, however, be always of great importance to inquire: first, what has the Saviour commanded? and then, supposing that the Saviour, or his apostles, were placed in the same situation as that in which the inquirer now stands; what would they have done? It is too much to say, that this would lead to infallibility in judgement and practice; yet, all experience proves, that such an inquiry honestly pressed upon the conscience; and united with humble dependence upon God, and a diligent study of Scripture; will raise mankind to the highest wisdom, and purity, of which, they are capable in the present world.

CHAP. VII.

A STATEMENT OF SEVERAL DUTIES CLEARLY
IMPOSED UPON THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

A minute investigation of those precepts and examples, which express the will of our Lord in respect to the private conduct of his servants, does not form the object of this treatise: but, those which relate to their duties in the church, require particular attention.

Let us consider, therefore, first, what are the points clearly determined respecting the privilege of membership.

And, 1st. The very spirit of the dispensation, together with the concurrent force of precept and example, prove that these rules are restrictive. To the privileges and duties of men, every individual of our race is entitled by birth. But the children of the flesh, are not the heirs of the promise. Human nature must undergo a change, before it is admitted to the privileges of the church. The wood, hay, straw, and stubble, of fallen nature; must not be built up into that edifice: for, if they be, it will be burned. The materials for this mighty work, are souls renewed

by grace, represented by gold, silver, and precious stones ; which will bear the trial of fire, and beautify the building. I. Cor. iii. 10, 15.

2. At an early period, and by almost every successive generation, there has been a tendency to regard external distinctions as the term of Christian privilege. The Jews preferred the Jews and their descendents ; the Greeks preferred the Greeks ; the free would have the church composed of free men ; slaves and their posterity, would claim to be pitied as slaves ; the Barbarian, puts in his claim ; and the Scythian, his ; but, the apostle rejects them all : for, in Christ Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Greek, Barbarian nor Scythian, bond nor free ; but Christ is every thing in every man ; with him, there is no preference given either to one, or to the other ; the law which applies to one must apply to all : Christ must be formed in their hearts, or they have no hope of glory, and God will not receive them. Col. iii. 1—25.

3. It is on this account, that the moral character is, everywhere, forced into such prominence by the sacred writers. They had not the levity which loves to trifle with feeling, either by reproaching the unfortunate, or by assailing the guilty. Their's was the charity, that loves to hide a multitude of sins. But, they had to de-

clare the law of a Superior ; from which there was no appeal, and by which all things in the church must be governed. The mighty King in Zion had decreed, that all his servants, should be conformed to the image of his Son ; and, since the principles which governed his Son, are just the opposite to those which regulate the world, each natural man must from necessity, be born again, or he cannot even see the kingdom of heaven : much less shall he be permitted to enter it. John iii. 3.

4. It is not the completeness of the work of grace, but the reality of the spiritual life ; which forms in all the examples of Scripture, a term of Christian fellowship. The statement of the rule is, sometimes different, because of the different objects to which it relates. In respect to the principles of the world, and the natural life of man ; every one, who is in Christ Jesus, must be a new creature. In respect to the rebellion of fallen nature, every one, must have repentance towards God. In respect to the atonement of sin, and acceptance with God ; each must have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. In respect to the darkness of the carnal mind, each must come to sit at the feet of Jesus, that he may be taught and assisted in all things. The candidate may not be perfect ; but he must be alive unto God. He

must be willing to learn, and do the will of God; he must be a recipient of mercy, animated with zeal for the glory of his Redeemer. The work of God must be begun in him, and marked with proof that God has received him.

5. The inspired apostles always regard two points with intense solicitude; first, that the men of the world should, by repentance and faith, become members of the church; and secondly, that the members of the church should be all accepted in the presence of our Lord at his coming. In the latter case, he supposes the possibility of mistake, and the existence of a higher tribunal. Hence, he exhorts the churches to take heed what kind of material they lay upon this foundation. The duty of the church, therefore, in admitting its members, is to draw the line of separation from the world as distinctly as they can. To show no respect for persons or mere external difference in circumstances. To search with care, that they may know whether the candidate be passed from death unto life: remembering that the judgement of the church on earth, has to be revised by the judgement of Him, who will search the heart.

Secondly. The law respecting the privilege of those who make credible profession of their faith is clearly stated by our Lord. One is your master, even Christ, all ye are brethren.

This declaration is intended to express a twofold equality. First, in the completeness of their subjugation ; secondly, in the extent of their individual privileges. Like children in the house of their parent, they are all alike subjected to parental governance. This is the yoke of Christ which must be borne by all his followers ; and from which, no personal distinction, whether it be founded in gifts, or wealth, or official dignity, can form the smallest exception. But, on the other hand, though none are permitted to despise a Parent's law, none are excluded from the enjoyment of their Father's love. Each believer, therefore, is in the church entitled, not to the portion which a stranger or a guest might expect to receive, but to that portion which a son can claim in his own home by virtue of his Father's authority. Let, therefore, the ground of this claim, and the points in which it may be urged upon the brethren, be a little more distinctly contemplated.

The ground of this claim is either general or particular. Its general ground is the work and atonement of Jesus the Christ. He came, and was anointed, that he might reconcile the world to God ; and that sinners who were ready to perish, might have access to a reconciled God and Father by Christ Jesus. On these terms every sinner in the world may claim admission into the church. Let him only repent, and return to God, and nothing on earth can exclude him, because the God of heaven has created and confirmed the privilege.

The particular ground of this claim is the work of grace upon a man's own heart. This is the production of the Spirit sent forth, by the Father and the Son. When this can be traced in the exercise of faith, the hatred of sin, the advance of sanctification, and the increase of spiritual joy ; then the actual reception of God may be practically seen ; and, because, God has received him as a dear child, the church is bound to receive him as a dear brother, for it is composed of children.

Both these grounds of the Christian's claim, are strengthened by the divine decrees. In these, God has determined, that Christ should be set forth as the only Saviour to a perishing world. Those who plead that appointment,

therefore, have the firmest ground to expect that they shall never be refused acceptance. And, further, the elect of God, are chosen to eternal life, through sanctification of the Spirit, and the belief of the truth. If, therefore, this belief and sanctification can be traced, we have the highest presumptive evidence to show, that these are the very individuals who have been predestinated to enjoy the privileges of the church, both in time, and in eternity.

It is true, that the judgement of the church on earth cannot be final; because, human investigation is imperfect. Every decision, therefore, will be revised in the judgement of the great day. It is on this account, that so much care is to be taken to render it as precise and perfect as we can. The candidate must search his own heart, seek the advice and assistance of those who are more advanced, and lay the facts of his case before the church, that they may assist him in the solemn determination; in like manner, the church must use the utmost fidelity and care; the facts must be examined, his reputation must be considered, and nothing lost sight of, which might serve to confirm their hope, that the faith he professes is genuine; and, that God has really received him to his fellowship and favour. Hence, the Scripture pre-

cedents are marked with a solicitude which we might expect in those who had to administer the law of God. The hope of political or pecuniary advantage are rejected with contempt.* If the knowledge be imperfect, and the state of the heart, sincerely docile, they are taught more perfectly and re-baptized.† Every thing is made to turn on that one point, which determines the everlasting destiny of the soul. Hence the very words used in the law of mercy, constitute the rule of admission to the church. To a sinful and perishing world, the apostles declared, that “whosoever believed should be saved.” To a candidate for communion with the saints, they said, “If thou believest with all thy heart, thou mayest.” John iii. 36. Acts xvi. 31. viii. 37.

It is also important to observe here, that the positive law includes the converse in each case. He that believeth shall be saved, is the declaration of mercy which was rendered necessary by the previous fact, that all those who did not believe, were exposed to condemnation. In like manner, if thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest, would be quite impertinent if it were not for the fact, that faith and the

* Acts viii. 20. † Acts xix. 1—8.

mercy which it secures, are the only grounds of Christian fellowship. John iii. 36. iii. 3. Gal. vi. 15.

The claim which each believer is, on the ground of his faith and of God's mercy, entitled to lay before the church, comprehends the equal fellowship, of a brother in the society of his brethren. This contains a number of particular privileges, some of which may be specified.

1. Every such believer has, by the mercy of God, a right to fellowship in the sacraments of the church. It is for him who believes to ask, and then he may expect to receive. The Ethiopian said, what hindereth? Philip replied, nothing, if thou believest with all thine heart. "Can any man forbid water?" said Peter; and he commanded them to be baptized straightway, for no man could refuse when God had received and blessed them with his Spirit.* On the same ground is claimed fellowship in the supper of the Lord: because it is appointed by the same authority, to be observed by the same individuals, and is inseparably connected with the same law of mercy. He that believeth shall be saved, and he that believeth may be baptized: faith in Christ, is the very qualification of a

* Acts x. 47.

disciple, whilst every disciple is commanded to eat this bread, and drink of this cup in remembrance of that mercy by which he is saved. Rom. iii. 23—26. I Cor. xi. 23—31.

Besides, there is a kind of responsive connexion between the two ordinances, by which they are both united to the reality of Christian principle. In the supper, Christians show forth the death of their Lord until he comes ; in baptism, they are planted together in the likeness of that death. * The supper pledges the love of Christ to them, baptism pledges the love of Christians to their Lord. In receiving the supper, they confess their entire dependence on the atonement of Christ, in receiving baptism, they declare that they have received his mercy, and confess their obligation to his service, to be planted together in the likeness of his resurrection, as those who have risen to newness of life. Baptism regards a past act of experience, and self-consecration ; the supper includes a distinct reference to the future coming of our Lord. There is also a corresponding solemnity in each ; one was appointed the night on which he was betrayed ; the other at the very time of his ascension ; one, therefore, is celebrated by

* Rom. vi. 1—7.

the church assembled in his presence ; the other in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. There is, therefore, a sacramental seriousness in each, which connects it with the same principle of solemn and rational piety, and renders the act, either absurd, or hypocritical, where that piety does not exist.

2. This claim of a believer on the church, includes also, an equal share in all its instructions and discipline. Hence, the brethren are commanded “to watch over each other in love,” “to exhort each other daily ;” and, in fact, to use every means in their power of advancing the spiritual interests of each, and of the whole, that all may stand with acceptance before the judgement seat of Christ. Eph. iv. 10, 16.

This claim does not relate to that ordinary declaration of faith, which the believer may enjoy in common with the unbeliever : but, to that more perfect discipline, which, though it has almost ceased to exist in modern churches, formed in the ancient church, a mighty instrument of leading its own members on to perfection. It is a claim to the culture of piety in the churches. Eph. ii. 19—22. iii. 14—21.

3. Each believer may claim his share in the dignity of the church. He may have been the chief of sinners, but faith in the blood

of Jesus cleanses him from all sin. Hence the apostles, in addressing particular individuals, as well as collective bodies, seem to search out words expressive of profound respect and tender affection; the ordinary compliments of the world are laid aside, and all the salutations expressly recognise the change. They are no more styled men, but holy brethren, elect, called to be saints; as though they would never forget that those whom they addressed, had the unspeakable honour of calling God their Father, and heaven their home. Rom. viii. 16, 23. I Cor. xi. 22. Matth. xxv. 45.

4. He may claim an equal share in the sympathies of the church, for rising from the same ruin, they aspire to the same glory, and, therefore, they are commanded to bear each other's burdens in the Lord, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

5. He is equally eligible to every office as God shall give him time and ability to fill it. The two appointed by God are thence established, under divine authority, but they are to be filled by individuals chosen from amongst the brethren. There is no hereditary priesthood, nor any privileged diaconocracy. They are open to all whom divine grace has exalted to be kings and priests unto God. In fact, they are

by their Redeemer, constituted members of his body, partners in his interest, and sharers of his reward. I Pet. i. 3—7. ii. 1—10. Rom. xii. 3—8.

Respecting the officers in the church, several points may be determined, some from the precepts, some from the examples recorded in the New Testament, and some are supported by both.

1. The principal object, of all official exertions in the church, is fixed in our Lord's commission to the apostles: * "Go ye forth and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." The word *μαθητευω*, here rendered to teach, signifies rather to proselyte, or make disciples of all nations. It is interpreted by the apostle, when he declares his own commission to the nations. It was to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light; and from the power of Satan unto God. Act. xxvi. 17, &c. II Tim. ii. 24—26. I Tim. i. 12—17. ii. 5—7. Eph. iii. 8—12. II Cor. v. 20, 21. ii. 14—17.

2. The same words in Matthew, determine the time of this official exertion. For the Saviour adds: "lo I am with you always, even

* Matth. xviii. 19.

unto the end of the world." And, though there is no question, but that the end of the world may sometimes mean the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish government ; yet this object has a particular reference to the moral government of the world, and is ever spoken of in reference to the final judgement. It must therefore be prosecuted until Christ shall come.

3. It is also to be noted that the commission includes one kind of duty to be performed after baptizim, and another before. The nations are, if possible, to be proselyted to the truth, whatever the state in which we find them ; but those who are proselyted and baptised, are to be taught more perfectly to observe all things whatsoever the Saviour has commanded them. The object of official exertion, therefore, is the same as the object of Christian fellowship. It is to convert sinners to God, and to raise the converted to the highest purity and spiritual perfection. For these, the church and its officers are bound to labour, until Christ shall come to judgement.

4. The kind of officers is also determined. The one is spiritual, the other temporal. It does not appear that this distinction was exclusive, on either side ; but only served to distinguish the one from the other, according to the busi-

ness in which they were principally employed. Hence, the apostles and the spiritual officers, were given to the word of God and prayer. This does not mean that they never, after the election of deacons, interfered in the temporal affairs of the church ; but that their principal employment was in teaching the truth, and in conducting the worship and discipline of the church. This, together with the care of the poor, and the appropriation of gifts to the church, was too much for their time and strength. Hence the deacons were chosen to be their helpers. From this they receive their name (diaconos), signifying a servant or helper. They were not excluded from teaching, but their principal engagement was to help the spiritual labourer, by bearing the burden of temporal affairs. The spiritual office is the principal, it was appointed first, and must stand until the judgement. The temporal office is subordinate, it was called for by temporal necessity, and is continued only till that necessity is removed.

5. There are two ways in which God has appointed individuals to fill these offices. The first is, extraordinary and supernatural, the second ordinary and providential.

By the first method, God was pleased to provide an extraordinary supply of agency suited to the necessities of the infant church. Individuals were selected by the discriminating eye of the Redeemer himself. He called them by name, gave them his commission from his own lips, trained them in his own society, rendered them infallible by the inspiration of his Spirit; he endowed them with gifts, of miracles, of tongues, of prophecy, and whatever else was useful in convincing the nations. Thus they went forth under the direct and clear authority of heaven. In this case, no question was left to be determined by man, but the fact of the supernatural appointment. Paul who had been a persecutor, was at first suspected of imposition; but after the brethren had been convinced that God had chosen and appointed him, they glorify God on his behalf. Gal. i. 22—24.

But, secondly, the ordinary method of filling these offices, was by providential arrangements. The brethren were then treated as the subjects of providential care in this particular respect. When necessities arose to try them, some individual of their number was endowed with gifts for the occasion. No miracle was wrought; but the ordinary course of events, combined with mutual consultations, enabled them to see

the course of prudence and of duty. Thus, without any miracle, Matthias was chosen to the apostolate ; * the first seven deacons were thus chosen by the whole assembly ; † and in the same way, Paul and Barnabas were set apart by the church at Antioch for their peculiar work. ‡ When any supernatural appointment is clearly shown, all who fear the Lord are bound to submit ; § but this has not been the case since the age of the apostles ; and consequently, the offices of the church, both temporal and spiritual, are filled by such persons as seem to the brethren to be intended by God for that purpose : when they have prayerfully considered, the gifts of the Spirit and the guidance of providence.

6. Rich instruction is furnished in the word of God to guide the church in the election of officers. But most of these instructions relate to two points ; first, the official endowments, secondly, the moral worth and reputation of the individual. In both cases, however, it is supposed that the candidate is willing to undertake the responsibility, for there is no compulsion amongst brethren. If, therefore, a member

* Acts i. 15—26.

† Acts vi. 1—6.

‡ Acts xv. 2.

§ Acts xiii. 2—4.

of the church desire the office of a bishop, and consequently seek the consultation and advice of the church; the church is bound to consider solemnly before God: first, whether his acquirements, gifts, and experience, be such as shall enable him to fulfil the duties of his office? He must be no novice, and he must be apt to teach, for he can neither give nor use what he never had; and God would never place him in an office for which he had never prepared him. Secondly, as solemn an inquiry must be made, whether the spiritual endowments of his mind be sincere, and sufficiently eminent to render him an example to the flock, and to secure the consideration of the world by the force of his religious reputation. Mark ix. 33—50. x. 35—45. I Tim. iii. 1—7. iv. 6—16. II Tim. ii. 1—10. Titus i. 5—9.

Both these inquiries admit of different modifications at different times. When the brother is about to be recommended to the ministry in general, with the prospect of spending some years in a course of preparatory study; the ripeness of experience, and the extent of learning, are not so important as strength of mind, and fervent piety, to improve the time in which they may be acquired, and to use them when possessed. In choosing a pastor, experience

and attainments are more or less important, according to the character of the church, and the wants of surrounding districts. In selecting an evangelist for destitute places, either at home or abroad; care must be taken to consider well the qualifications necessary for the particular task; remembering at every step, that the decision of the church will be followed, either with much good or great harm, as God shall help them to determine with propriety, or leave them to folly and caprice.

If any brother desire the office of a deacon, there are two questions to be determined. First, whether a deacon is wanted or no; secondly, whether the brother be eligible or not? For there is nothing to compel a church to elect one; but if such a helper be necessary, it is permitted. Still the choice must be made according to God's word, and the directions in this, as in the former case, relate to official qualification and moral character. Both these must be such as shall secure, not the comfort of a few, but of all the church: and the vigorous efficiency of all the means of grace. It is on this account that all the elections mentioned in Scripture are said to have been made in a solemn convention for prayer before the Lord. Acts vi. 1—6. I Tim. iii. 8—16.

It is obvious to remark here, that as far as relates to political power or physical force, everything in the church is perfectly free. The only power to be feared, is the power of God ; the only judgement, is his throne. Even when Jesus called his apostles by name, there was no earthly law, nor any earthly power to enforce obedience : they were subjected by divine authority alone. In the same manner, nothing but the positive proof of miraculous appointment, could have enabled Paul to demand, either the acceptance of his brethren, or the attention of the world. Where this is shown, and if at all, it must be by positive proof, mankind have no scope for deliberation ; their only business, in such cases, is to obey. But where this positive proof of divine authority has not been produced, the point of wisdom and duty is to be consulted. Still, in this deliberation, there is no space left for caprice. The work, the qualifications, and the character, of both pastor and deacon, being clearly defined ; the consultation of the church is nothing more than an act of obedience performed by the whole assembly : they are brethren seeking to understand the will of their Father, in order to advise in the conduct of a brother.

7. The instructions relating to the duties of officers are very complete. In principle, there is nothing left us to be desired; and very little in the application. The duties of the bishop relate, to himself, and to his flock. In himself, he is to labour after eminent piety, and consecration, which shall render him an example to the church in all things. To this, he is bound by the ordinary laws of the gospel; but, in his official capacity, he has a more solemn obligation: through the peculiar consecration of himself to God. He is set apart to seek the advancement and the confirmation of the Saviour's government in the church. For this purpose he watches over the souls of its members, as one that must give an account. He is to watch over the people committed to his care, as a physician does, over the patients he is labouring to heal. He must cultivate them, as a husbandman does, the vineyard which he wishes to be fruitful. He must train them, as a captain would, the band whom he desires to be victorious. In this, too, as in respect to himself, the aim is twofold. First, he seeks their health and safety, and secondly, their usefulness to others. For the church is, in every part of its constitution, an aggressive system. It is formed for the subjugation of the world.

The business of the bishop is to lead this advance upon the kingdom of darkness, and to place himself continually in the post of difficulty and danger. The conflict is spiritual, the victory is spiritual, and the reward is spiritual, and eternal; and, therefore, the office is spiritual: but, as every other engagement has a direct reference to this, and exists for this end, no temporal affair of the church should be lost sight of by the bishop. His care must be over all, that everything be so conducted by himself, or by his assistants, as to further the spiritual triumph of the church.

Many of the directions for regulating the performance of this duty must be inferred from the qualities which are required in his character. There is also a class of instructions most important in those expressive negatives used in the description of a bishop. Besides this, the love of power, the love of wealth, and the love of violence, are as expressly forbidden, as adultery, theft, and murder. From whence it is manifest, that the bishop is required to labour for his object, in the depth of spiritual prostration; resigning the ambition and pleasures of time, for the glory and rewards of eternity. II. Tim. ii. 1—13. I. Tim. vi. 11—16. II. Tim. iv. 1—8. Matt. x. 16—42.

8. The law of God respecting the support of his ministers is presented in a double form. First, it is addressed to ministers themselves. The distinct command to them, when stated by our Lord was, take neither purse nor scrip, commit yourselves to providence, and take what it sets before you; for the labourer is worthy of his hire. This law is expounded by Paul in his II. epistle to Timothy, chap. ii. verse 4, "No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." The object of this passage, was to teach Timothy that his duty required him to bring into every part of his work, the concentrated energies of a mind unencumbered with worldly solicitude. Matt. x. 1—15. Luke x. 1—12. Matt. x. 16—42. II Tim. ii. 4—6. II Cor. vi. 1—10. II Cor. v. 6—11.

Secondly. The law is addressed to the church on his behalf, on those who form this assembly a threefold obligation is imposed. First, of gratitude, secondly, of divine precept, thirdly, of social compact.

1. The obligation derived from the law of gratitude rests on the nature of the ministerial work, and the aim with which it is undertaken. When comforted with the assurance of divine

mercy, he had no greater interest for himself, than to spend his days in appropriating its blessings to his own improvement and comfort: but, whilst he rejoiced in the hope of glory, thousands were living without God, and without hope in the world. For the sake of these he undertook the arduous duty of travelling in birth with souls. He could not enjoy his spiritual things alone. He longed to share with those who were destitute, the bread, and water of life. For the sake of effecting this, he resigned the pursuit of earthly things; and, leaving his own interests to the care of providence, devoted himself to the interests of his fellow men. In this resolution, he may be pitied for his imprudence, and even despised and resisted for his folly, by the men of this world. But, those who are converted to God, and being brought into the church have tasted with him that the Lord is gracious, will, as they increase in spiritual joy and purity, feel that he, through whose devoted labour they have been thus enriched, deserves to be regarded as their greatest benefactor; and, as such, to be supported in all his necessities and weakness: not with a cold and parsimonious allowance; but, with a grateful generosity. that

feels itself unable to return the favours already received. II. Cor. v. 12, 15. xi. 23—31.

2. The obligation founded on divine appointment, is partly implied in the apostolical reasoning, and partly expressed in their precepts to the churches. For, the whole reasoning in the 11th and following chapters of the II. Epistle to the Corinthians, rests upon the fact that, though the apostle had no claim upon the church by the laws of Greece, yet, as a minister of Christ, he had a just claim upon them by the law of God. Hence, his refusing to exact that right, is advanced as a proof of his generous and devoted love for their souls. Hence, too, the help he received from Macedonia is called wages; because it was due to him for faithful labour. Yet he calls this robbing other churches, because they did not receive the benefit of his labours in Corinth. Hence, it is manifest, that in the estimation of Paul, the church at Corinth, which received the benefit of his labours, was bound by the law of God to provide for his temporal support. This conclusion agrees exactly with the explanation of divine law in reference to this case, presented by the same apostle to this same church in the 9th chapter

of his 1st Epistle. He there speaks of a deliverance from bodily labour, and the enjoyment of domestic comfort, as a privilege which was due to himself, and Barnabas; as well as to the rest of his brethren in the Christian ministry. The others enjoyed this privilege; but he, for the sake of the Corinthians had foregone his claim. He did not, however, forego the right. This he establishes by an appeal to the Mosaic law : thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. I Cor. ix. 8.

The allusion here, is to the ancient mode of thrashing. The oxen were driven round and round the barn floor, and, by treading on the corn, loosened the grain from the ear. If the oxen were muzzled, whilst providing the food for others, they themselves might starve. This was regarded by Moses as an act of injustice so gross, that it could not be allowed even to a beast. It was, therefore, forbidden in the lowest case; in order that the principle might receive the force of divine law in all its applications. If an ox may not be muzzled when labouring for man, much less may one man be muzzled when labouring for the good of his brethren. And, further, if such cruelty be condemned when exercised towards a beast, in return for earthly things; much more shall it

be condemned when exercised towards a fellow man, in return for labours the most devoted, and benefits that are spiritual and everlasting.

It does not follow from this, that all the appointments of Moses applied to the Christian church. If this were the case, the church would cease to be Christian. Neither is this law, in the letter of it, a matter of importance to us now; because oxen are never used for that purpose: but the principle it involves, is thus by the inspired authority of the apostle Paul rendered a divine law in the Christian church: and especially when applied to the Christian ministry. In the world they may, and they must expect, to be despised; but in the church they cannot lose their honour and support without a direct violation of divine precept. The will of God is thus made clear. On this account it is, as well as on account of his love for his servants, that Jesus has identified all their interests with his own. Every thing that is done to them, is in the description of his judgement, declared to be done unto himself; by their offences he himself is offended; and not even a cup of cold water given unto the least of them in his name, shall ever lose its reward. Deut. xxv. 4. I. Tim. v. 17, 18. I. Cor. ix. 1—27. Matt. x. 7. xviii. 10—14. x. 40—42.

3. The obligation derived from the force of human compacts, rests on the method by which the minister is appointed to his office. If he were divinely inspired, he might, by virtue of that inspiration, claim from the church whatever the Holy Spirit should signify to be his will they should either do or give, to serve or comfort, the messenger of God. But if he be not inspired, and we have none of that description now, how then does he become the minister of any particular church? Not by special divine appointment; but by the voluntary election of the members belonging to the church over which he presides, or of some other by whom he is supported. Let each of these cases be separately considered.

First, then, in all independent churches; that is, those who are able to support their own minister, the choice rests with the members alone. They elect the man whom they love most; and, whom they think most likely to lead their devotions, to advance their improvement, and secure the efficiency of their united exertions in promoting the kingdom of their Lord. He is separated from the world, and set apart to this work, at their solemn request. He did not make the overture, but they. He listened to their proposal from a regard to their

interests, and wishes. From his regard to their interests and wishes he threw himself on their generosity, and the care of providence. In this case he becomes perfectly dependent. At their request he resigns his all for them. They at the same time promise a constant and generous support. In this case, therefore, there is a clear and solemn engagement, like that subsisting between a man and his wife ; and, the wife is not more dependent on the generous and faithful care of her husband, than the pastor on the church's. It is true that the latter compact is protected by an earthly law, which does not exist in respect to the former, excepting in compulsory establishments ; but, the moral obligation to fulfil the compact is, in each case, the same ; there was no law to compel its formation ; but, when formed, it could never be violated without sin.

The second class of churches embraces our missionary and home missionary stations, and such small churches as are unable alone to support the ministry and bear the expenses of publick worship. These are not strictly independent of other churches. They must receive from them pecuniary assistance ; and, at times, they may need religious counsel. The little church in some heathen country, if it consisted

but of three members, is obliged by divine law to maintain divine worship, and to promote the kingdom of heaven in the very best way it is able, more than this it cannot perform, but this is its duty. Their exertion, however, is not sufficient to meet the necessities of the station. A place for publick worship is needed, and a minister devoted to publick teaching. In order to maintain these, help is solicited from other churches. The churches or society which render this help, will, of course, consider whether the attempt be a wise one, and whether the minister be “a man after God’s own heart.” When this is done, they form their compact. The minister is invited to occupy the station; the church agrees to support him as well as they can; both by their own exertions, and by the help of their brethren. Lastly, these their brethren of other churches, or of some society, agree to help them with a certain sum, say ten or fifty pounds a year, for so long a time, in order that they may have a minister to comfort and assist them in the work of the Lord. Here, therefore, is a compact including three parties; and all must be faithful. The minister must be faithful, and do the work of the Lord. The society or neighbouring churches must be faith-

ful, and not forsake their brethren in distress and difficulty. And so must the church be faithful, and not neglect their duty because others have been kind enough to come forward and help them. It would be nothing short of a base violation of justice, if they were to withhold or to diminish their support just because they had obtained a remittance from some church, or foreign society for their help. This should make them do their duty with more cheerfulness, and not wantonly neglect it.

There are five serious errors connected with this duty, which ought to be exposed and reprehended, because each has been productive of much guilt and desolation in the churches.

The first is a neglect of its real obligation, which is too frequently indulged even by the members of churches themselves. The duty is then placed amongst their gratuities; to be disregarded or continued, with little, or perhaps, without any consideration. If they have a loss, or a bad year in trade, or anything that calls for a little retrenchment, this is the first thing to be withheld, forgetting that on the faith of that engagement, the pastor has rested the wants of himself and family; whilst he is devoted to their best interests. By this means the support of the ministry oftentimes becomes

exceedingly precarious. The engagements made by the whole body are unfulfilled, those individuals who feel their responsibility are deeply oppressed, and the fellowship of the church first becomes burdensome, then contentious, and finally it is forsaken ; thus, the interest, either fails entirely, leaving the neighbourhood in destitution, or else it drags along from year to year a diseased and paralyzed existence : attended with little comfort to the saints, and with still less benefit to the sinners that are perishing around them.

Sometimes the case is even worse than this. In these days of generous exertion in the work of God, the credit of devotedness is of great importance. Hence it is no uncommon thing to find the name of a church and its pastor in the list of those who seek the charitable assistance of some publick society, whilst the members of that very church are, at the same time, advertised as subscribers to a much greater amount to some foreign object. Here it is plain that the defective support of the pastor was not the result of poverty, but neglect. A man who has a family may be generous if he can afford it, but he must not wring the materials for generosity out of the teeth of his hungry children. Members of a church who have a pastor should

be generous to all; but before they are generous to others, they ought to remember, that God will require them to be just to him.

The second error to be noticed, is, an evasion of the duty by transferring its obligation to those who are not members of the church, or to those who happen to be rich. By this means, many an interest has been destroyed. The prosperous brother becomes the lounge, against which, every individual throws down his burden until it can no longer be endured. And if it did not become oppressive through the pecuniary demand, yet its moral influence would be destructive. The indolence induced by inactivity, would render the relief a curse, rather than a blessing to the church. Their interest consists in the cheerful performance of their duty; and, should one of the number be entrusted with greater wealth, let him not be grieved with unjust demands; but rather let him be encouraged to generous exertions where real necessity requires his help.

But, in respect to those who are not members of the church, the effect is very painful. There may be several, or perhaps, but one or two who care nothing for the kingdom of our Lord; who despise the ordinances of his house; who never thought of serving or loving Him in their lives: still from some personal feeling they may at-

tend, they may respect religion in general, but never have felt its power, nor ever have submitted to its discipline. They hold seats in the place, and they may subscribe to the support of the ministry : all this may be well if it be done freely and without any spiritual sacrifice on the part of the church. But, often, when the church is poor, and even when it has no room to complain of poverty, a person in the congregation possessing a little wealth, will be so infested with flattery, and applications for pecuniary assistance, as to render his situation excessively galling, and place the gospel before him in a most repulsive view. The effect will be regulated by his disposition. If the worldly man have no particular attachment to the people, nor any interest connected with the place, he will soon forsake it ; and multitudes who have thus been goaded by the claims of the church, before they had any sincere love for the truth, have been driven from the means of grace altogether. On the other hand, it will often happen that the attachments may be strong to the place, or the interests of a worldly man may be interwoven with the people of God. Policy then induces a compliance with the unguarded wish of the church. The man of the world is made its benefactor, perhaps a manager of the

congregation, a trustee to the place of worship; until by virtue of his offices and his wealth, the government of the whole is within his power; then, without obeying the law of God himself, he can guide the service, regulate the elections of the church, and manage the whole according to his inclinations. If he take no interest in the truth, or happen to hold it in theory, it will be fortunate for the rest: but if he dislike it, they will suffer. The wish of him who holds the power will not long remain unfulfilled. Hence the places built by our forefathers for the declaration of truth, have been prostituted to the idol of Socinian heresy. Errors of all kinds, from the most gross to the most subtle, have thus been cherished in the precincts of the temple: and every ruinous enemy has been let loose to prey upon the flock, until they were scattered or devoured.

The great cause of the whole is this. The men who do sincerely love the Lord, feel that the ministry and the worship of God ought to be supported; but then, they think it more wise to shift a portion of the load on those who are able to bear it. They forget, at the moment, that the engagement and the obligation are with them, and thus they are deluded into an act which they never thought of. They flatter bad

men to their utter ruin, and exalt the disobedient to their own destruction. Every man who loves the Saviour, ought to feel, that he himself is bound to support the cause of God, to the utmost of his capability: striving to render it independent of worldly assistance, and thus recommending his claim to the obedience of mankind, by the force of a generous example.

The third error to be noted is, neglect of duty in consequence of help received from external sources. In this way, the worst effects of pauperism, are produced in the Christian church. Perhaps the brethren may be really poor, but this involves them in the ruinous calamity of indolence, as well as poverty. They know that societies do exist for the help of such as need it. Their first object, therefore, is to state their case so as to obtain such help. Having done this, they think their pastor has received a favour from them; and they immediately slacken their exertions. Year after year passes, and they never add a farthing to his income. Some churches are known to stand in this position, sinking in their supineness, and crying for charity, for ten, twenty, thirty, or even fifty years together; until the very wish for a state of independence has become extinct. The idleness of their hearts in respect to temporal, soon

infects their spiritual things. With a name to live, they become dead. Religion is so dishonoured in the circle around them, that their existence is regarded as a misfortune which ages can scarcely repair.

This conduct rests upon an entire mistake. When a society subscribes for the relief of a church; a favour is conferred, not on the pastor, but on the people. They are the persons bound to support him. He labours for them, and for their good; and has a claim upon them for his support. If they are unable to do what is necessary, the society affords *them* help, not him. It is no sin for them to be poor. But, when they have been encouraged by the help of the society, or by the kindness of Christian friends, it is wicked and shameful in them to neglect their duty, they ought rather to be excited to greater efforts, by gratitude, combined with their former obligation.

The fourth error is, the allowance of a selfish and worldly ambition. This operates in two ways: first, it diminishes the resources of the church; and, secondly, it poisons and pollutes them. In both cases, it is the danger of the rich, rather than of the poor; though both have need to beware of its influence. It diminishes the resources of the church, by dry-

ing up the stream of benevolence which flowed from the hearts that have become infected. When their income was a little more than their daily wants required, they could always spare something for God. The wants of his minister were then felt with some degree of sympathy; but after they had tasted of gain, and the hope of being numbered with the *respectable* had been entertained, then the artificial wants of a growing ambition, rendered them too poor to give. Thus, men forget the Father of their mercies; and the richest blessings of his hand, become the means of their destruction. It is not wrong for them to grow wealthy, and respectable, when God permits them to do so justly; but as they are not allowed to grow wealthy by stealing, so they are not permitted to gratify their worldly ambition, by withholding their pastor's support.

On the other hand, it is quite possible, that the amount of money subscribed to an interest, should be treated as a matter of too great importance. Amongst the wealthy, and often amongst those who only wish to be so, this is regarded as the one thing needful. They are not only Christians, they are respectable Christians; and they must maintain their elevation. Their subscriptions to every society must be the largest; their place of worship must be the most

splendid. The salary of their minister must be the most generous. The mode of their intercourse must be expensive. In a word, everything must be done "in a style worth mentioning." Consequently, every nerve must be strained, every eye is on the look out, and every hand is engaged in collecting materials. Some run on the edge of bankruptcy, and some fall in. The respectable inhabitants are courted, and in respectable ways. The intercourse of the saints, is adapted to their taste. The discipline of the church is softened to their endurance. The doctrines of the gospel are stated mildly, so as not to offend. Levities are provided for the light, and serious things for the grave. Their money must be had; and, therefore, they must be accommodated. In such churches will be found an heterogeneous mass of all kinds, Jews and Greeks, Barbarians and Scythians, bond and free, are all accommodated, and all combined; until Christ is nothing in any of them.

A further evil resulting from this, is the separation of religious interests. They thus become opposed to each other like the competitors of this world. The minister is made the object of a shameful quackery, which places him in positions where his modesty can scarcely be maintained. If he take the infection, the misery

is complete. The ambition for worldly respectability will poison all his exertions. It will warp all his views of character, and the bread that was given to feed his body, will prove a poison to his soul. He who was a brother, will become the rival of his fellow labourers. Instead of labouring to edify the whole church, he will strive to raise his own department with stones torn out of the adjacent walls. Then the evils will multiply with rapidity, until the swelling bubble bursts, and tells by the nothingness into which it sinks the vanity of its fancied greatness.

It is not supposed, in all this blunder, that the people have suffered their generosity to go beyond their obligation ; or, that the minister has gained more than was his due. It is the duty of a people, to rescue the man of their own choice from the corrosive influence of worldly care. In order to do this, they must place him in circumstances where he will not be compelled to endure a painful contrast with themselves. He need not be as rich as they, but he must not be exposed to the remark of their dependents, and the contempt of their children. He must be able to be respectable amongst respectable men ; to be decent ; to educate his children ; and to be charitable as well as they, if not to the same extent. His wants are not what he must eat

and drink, but what will secure his comfort, and usefulness, in the circle in which he moves ; and the station to which he is elected. This in all probability, will require more than he gets from his ambitious people. It is not, therefore, the amount that is given or obtained, that is liable to censure ; for if he has more than he needs he can give it away ; and should he save a hundred pounds apiece for his children at his decease, he would not sin. It is not the amount, therefore, but the motive, which deserves to be condemned. God requires every church to make their pastor as happy as they can ; but they must not do it in a spirit of worldly ostentation ; nor will he allow them to sacrifice the purity of the gospel, the discipline of the church, and the spirit of Christianity, for the sake of gratifying their worldly ambition.

The last error to be noticed, is a want of delicacy in performing the duty. This can be entertained by the churches only indirectly. It rests for the most part with the subordinate officers. Their station is certainly one of great importance, responsibility, and self-denial. But it is made infinitely more so, by a childish love of power. This gives a sort of exclusiveness to the office, which renders active assistance obtrusive, and explanation painful. From hence

as from a fountain, streams of calamity flow into the churches. The pastor will, of course, expect his share of the common evil. But he often gets a double portion. In some cases, he is reduced to the condition of a servant. His stipend is doled out to him irregularly, so that he knows scarcely when to expect it: and sometimes with great uncertainty as to the amount. In A. the pastor was obliged to call at his deacon's shop, and asking for a remittance after it had long been due, to be told that he must call again; he returned to his distressed family, and called again in a day or two, when he obtained a part, with orders to call again for the rest. In B. C. D., &c. the pastors are obliged to come to the countinghouses of their deacons, like other servants, to be paid before all, as though they had no more feeling than stones. In E. the deacon had been offended at the pastor's refusal to sanction an unjust measure, and withheld his salary to starve him down to submission. In F. and G. the salary of the pastor is regulated by one or more of the deacons alone; who judge of his wants by the inspection of his affairs, and he is often obliged to borrow before the remittance is due. At H., I., K., L, & M., all through the alphabet, cases occur, which form most melancholy instances

of human depravity, because they not only include what is unjust, and cruel; but the injuries are inflicted on those very men, who live for no other object than the comfort and improvement of their tormentors.

The cases represented by the letters are known facts, and the last word in the paragraph is strong, but let nothing be misunderstood. The causes of these evils are many and various. The two principal are, first, the characters of the men that are elected as deacons; and, secondly, their treatment after their election. In the first place, too much attention is paid, in the choice of deacons, to their worldly circumstances, and too little to their moral and spiritual attainments. And where a worldly man is chosen because he is the richest in the assembly, what can be expected but a worldly and cruel administration. It often happens that the man chosen has risen from obscurity, with all the coarseness of an uncultivated mind, and all the excitement of sudden acquisition. It is scarcely possible, in such a case, that he should not often wound the feelings of his pastor, because he has never learned what delicacy is. It is also undeniable that some of the pastors have to thank themselves for the evils under which they suffer. They resign the

sacred dignity of their office to seek the favour of man; and, when once gone, they find it impossible for them to regain it. Here it is easy to descend, but difficult to rise. Every minister ought, therefore, to feel, that if he suffer any great wrong, in nine cases out of ten, he has reason to repent rather than complain. Still, there is a duty devolving on every church, to which the members ought to pay a special regard. Thoughtlessness, without any evil intention, will often lead to results which produce pain. It should be the care of the whole church that this never occurred. Each of the members ought to be prepared, both to meet his own engagements at the proper time, and to demand the fulfilment of those entered into by all the members. The balance ought to be examined by auditors appointed by the church at least every year. Anything like a suspicious inquisitiveness should by all means be avoided, but a tender and constant inquiry after the comfort of their pastor, is the duty of every member in the church. And when a case occurs, so unfortunate as that of a real injury inflicted by a domineering and cruel spirit; an affectionate, but a most determined demand should at once be made, in the name of the whole body, for its redress.

Instead of this, the opposite is most painfully true; sometimes the collection of subscriptions is a laborious task. They are delayed from week to week, and from month to month, until few know when to expect them. The treasurer is overdrawn more than he can afford. All parties are thus forced into difficulty, difficulties produce impatience, grief and injury, soon follow; and, finally, the church is deprived of its pastor; who retires with a broken heart, from a sphere in which he might have finished his days, in works of love and mercy.

From the numerous cases that have been examined, it is believed that few occur in which any injury is intended. Most of the miseries rise from mistake or neglect. A few hints will be given to prevent these, when the law which prescribes the treatment of officers has been carefully examined.

9. The law of God respecting the treatment of officers, may be gathered from three sources.

1. From the dignity of the church in which they are elected.

2. From the positive commands of his word.

3. From the example of Christ and his apostles.

1. The dignity of the church is set forth in every possible way. The names chosen by the Spirit to describe it, and the care with which it is regarded in the dispensations of providence, invest it with a majesty, and sacredness, peculiar to itself. It is not the assembly of senators, or of nobles, but of saints; who, having received the Spirit of adoption, are permitted to call God their Father. By his authority, help, and guidance, they meet and conduct their worship and their business; as in his immediate presence. It is therefore called, the church of the living God; assembled by his command, directed by his law, and enriched by his presence and blessing. For this the Saviour died; and, therefore, it is said to be "purchased by his blood." The Spirit was given for its inspiration and guidance. The Saviour is made head over all things for this church; that he may complete its glory, and fulfil its predicted triumphs. It was therefore invested with the power of judgement on every moral offence. When individual expostulation, and limited testimony had failed; the offence was to be told to the church, and the judgement there made final. The Saviour advances still farther in saying that "whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven:" in which words, though

he does not confer infallibility on the church, yet he invests every correct decision of that body with a terrible solemnity. Hence the spirit of the apostle's reproof to the Corinthians for dishonouring the table of the Lord. After explaining the folly, he asks, "despise ye the church of God?" In fact, this was the only object of supreme affection and reverence upon earth; for this they were to sacrifice all things. Its meeting, therefore, was to be honoured, its decisions obeyed, and its privileges valued beyond all earthly good. To this, the election of all officers was referred. There in prayerful prostration before the throne of God, they were to be sought out and set apart by the united judgement and authority of the whole. Each officer, whether pastor or deacon, is in his station, thus made a representative of the whole body. If he be unfaithful, let him be judged by the whole body and removed. If he have fulfilled the terms of his office, let the account be rendered and another chosen. But whilst he continues in office, he is bound to maintain, and entitled to receive, the honour which is due to the whole church; and every insult offered to him, must be reckoned as an injury done to the whole, and to each individual part. The principle applies to all, to members

as to brethren; to deacons and pastors, as brethren who serve and represent the whole. But the Saviour puts the matter in a still more solemn light, referring to his messengers, he says, "he that receiveth you receiveth me."

2. It is important for the further elucidation of this duty to consider the positive precepts that are given. These, then, are of two kinds. First, direct; secondly, indirect. The indirect precepts are implied in the commands given to the officers. When they are appointed to any duty relating to the whole, the whole body must be bound by the law, but each part in its own capacity. If the one must teach, the other is bound to learn. If the one must rebuke, and exhort, the other is bound to receive correction. In a word, every direct command given to the bishop or deacon, is an indirect command binding the people to their corresponding duty. Titus chap. ii. verse 1 to 15; and chap. iii. verse 1 to 8.

The direct commands are those which are given immediately to the churches. Of this kind are I Thess. v. 12; and I Cor. xvi. 15. The point of both these commands is one. The word, to know, in both cases, regards, not the formation of an acquaintance, but the indulgence and expression of an appropriate

respect. It is explained by the phrase, "esteem them," not a little, but "very highly in love for their works' sake." It includes, whatever respect is due, to one who has been chosen by the church, with solemn prayer, to teach in the name of God the laws of the Redeemer: and to direct the efforts made by the church, to advance his eternal kingdom.

Another direct command is given in I Cor. xvi. 16. Its object is to give force to the former. They must not suppose that the honour is to be given as an empty compliment. They are engaged in a great work, and they must be treated as men undertaking real business. That business is the instruction and improvement of the church and congregation. Hence, they are "to submit themselves unto such," as disciples to a teacher, as soldiers to a leader, as patients to a physician. So must they "submit themselves to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth."

The commandment written in Heb. xiii. 7, relates rather to the constancy of the feeling, and at the same time intimates a reason for its cultivation. To remember, relates to past actions; and these past acts of kindness must be every day multiplied by persons in the faithful discharge of ministerial duties. If pro-

perly considered, the daily teaching of God's word, is the highest good that can be conferred on man; as such, therefore, it is to be esteemed and remembered. The character, too, is implied, not to be one of mean and abject service, but one of honour and rule; subject only to the law of God, and the engagement entered into with the church. In this, therefore, the honour is required constantly, as a feeling cherished willingly, towards those whom we remember with respect and love; and continue to remember, after their decease, when their kind instructions can be no longer enjoyed.

Heb. xiii. 17, is more pointed than the former. It states the official character as having rule. It states the object of their rule, "they watch for your souls." It points out the subordinate nature of that rule, for "they must give an account." It explains its benevolent spirit. "For they watch for your souls as those that must give an account that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." It is a rule founded in the choice of the brethren, supported by divine responsibility, and existing entirely for their good. It must, therefore, be obeyed. Having chosen the rulers, they are bound to submit, themselves.

Let these and passages such as these be compared with the example of Christ and his apostles. These, for a time, were the whole, or nearly the whole of his church. He was their pastor. One acted as treasurer, the rest of the twelve were private members. His congregations were many, and soon, others were added to the church. But it is in the treatment of the twelve that we see the nature of his pastoral care; and it is in the conduct of the twelve, that we see the example for church members. The deacon of this little church is described as a warning to all, it is hoped that none will imitate him. Once Peter was very reprehensible, and in some instances the conduct of others deserve but little praise. They were a fair sample of human nature when brought under the influence of restoring mercy; and, therefore, not without its imperfections. But still there is in their conduct much to be admired. Their first profession was very decided, they forsook all and followed him. In their attendance on his ministry they were constant, as though they deemed it the first business of their lives. They opened their hearts to him, as though they confided in his friendship and love. Even their errors were

not concealed. Every part of their intercourse was perfectly ingenuous. They never cavil. He teaches them their duty, and if they understand it, they obey; if not, they express their difficulty with tenderness. The obscurity of his doctrine never drives them into a sullen silence, and the freedom of inquiry never leads them to be impudent. It is manifest that they love to be in his society, and prefer the study of his word to any employment. The only thing that seems to form an objection to this statement, is the diligence with which they performed their labour of teaching in the cities of Judea. But, then they had his command, and his instruction; and they were engaged in his work, though not blessed with his immediate fellowship. Here, too, they had a vital sympathy with their teacher. They had chosen him, and he had called and accepted them; and they felt that all their interests were absorbed in the great design of his coming. They grieved over his sorrow, they were indignant at his insult, and they rejoiced in his success. They formed a church, in which there was one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all. Whether they were assembled in worship, or separated in the performance of individual

duties, the members of this assembly had but one interest which engrossed the affections of the whole. For this they laboured, for this they lived, and in the prosecution of this, they displayed a dignified, and affectionate subordination ; the most pure and delightful, of any that has ever appeared upon earth since the fall of man.

It may be objected, that they had the Lord himself among them ; whilst the pastors and the officers of churches, have neither the same perfection, nor the same authority.

To this it may be replied, that they will not assume the same authority for themselves, they only assert it in behalf of their Lord. They do not profess to inherit infallibility, but wish to guide their brethren in studying the infallible word. In this, the docility, and affectionate self-consecration exhibited by the disciples, are required. These qualities, also, are positively enjoined by Christ upon all. In this part of his work Jesus showed the officers in the church how they should labour and teach ; and in the conduct of his disciples, he has taught the churches how they must study and learn. Thus far, the example elucidates and confirms the law : and it is only for this pur-

pose, that the study of this example is now most earnestly recommended to the churches.

A further illustration of the truth may be obtained from the conduct of the apostles, and the early churches. They were all brought to feel, that they had to do with the law of God ; and, that they were bound both to study and to teach it with the utmost reverence.

If any deviation from this solemn docility was seen, the apostles rebuked it with an awful severity. But the cases were very few. They consulted like men who were free. They studied as men who had to learn the way of life and the will of God ; and the apostles taught, and ruled, as men that must give an account. “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart, and of one soul.” “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.” When persecuted they were faithful and obedient in sorrow ; and when the churches had rest : “they walked in the fear of the Lord, and the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and thus were multiplied. Indeed, the great secret of their success, is comprehended in the docility of their hearts, and the blessing of their God.

This last illustration deserves to be considered, first, as it is given by the authority of inspired men ; and, secondly, as those inspired men instructed Timothy and Titus, who were not inspired, to demand the same docility, to use the same dignity, and to show the same respect for the officers in the church. They were commanded not to rebuke the elders, but to entreat and honour them, as fathers ; from which it is easy to see how they ought to be treated by the private members of the churches.

It is requisite, before this section be concluded, to notice several popular errors which are more or less allowed on this subject.

The first consists in confounding religious liberty with licentiousness in spiritual affairs. In one sense it is the glory of the church to be free. It admits of no authoritative control from the men of this world. The members of the church collectively have no dictatorial power, nor has any one member authority to direct the conduct of his brethren, unless it be given him by the agreement of the whole. In the noblest sense, therefore, the church of Christ is free. But this will not release it from the law of God. The very reason for this freedom is the fact, that no tribunal but that of God is

sufficiently solemn for its final judgement ; and no law sufficiently perfect and powerful for its government, but the law of Omnipotence. Men are not allowed to touch the work of legislation here, lest they weaken its strength and destroy its dignity. The end of this arrangement, is not to make the law of God less solemn and effective, but to clothe it with a diviner majesty, and to impress upon every mind the sense of its immutability. Hence may be seen at once, the sin and wickedness which must follow, when caprice, frivolity, self-interest, temper, or levities of this kind, are permitted to divert the mind from God's word ; and modify, if not control the acts of the church. In some cases it would seem as though God had no authority there whatever. Every man, without cherishing any care over the cultivation of his own mind, rashly contends for the privilege of doing and believing what he likes. The question, whether his choice agrees with the will of God, never enters his mind. He will injure his brother, reproach a deacon, pierce the soul of his pastor with the most bitter sorrow, and throw up all his engagements, just when he was bound to fulfil them ; and all is done with the utmost lightness, because he is free. Let such men, however, bear in mind,

that when Christ made them free from human oppression, he did not terminate their subjection to himself; and though there may be no tribunal on earth where such injuries can be redressed now; the time is coming when he will say, "inasmuch as ye did it unto these, my brethren, ye did it also unto me."

The second is an indolent aversion to study. It arises partly from a bad state of heart, but chiefly from a mistaken view of Christian ordinances. In this respect, the members of our churches often resemble those sons of great men for whom the best instruction has been provided; and who, therefore, feel that they are raised above all personal exertions. This is totally wrong; all the use of tutors, is to awaken and to direct exertion: they can never be a substitute for it. It is the same with Christian ordinances. They may serve to call forth the energy of the people, and to direct them when properly awakened: but if they are regarded as a substitute for personal activity, they will inflict an injury where they were intended to confer a benefit. In the nature of things, it is not possible that a pastor with all the advantage of deacons and ordinances, could ever make a people wise unto salvation, who used no diligence in studying the word of God for themselves.

Nor will this suffice alone ; the man who wishes to profit by the word, must carefully study his own heart. It is for want of this that sermons are often disliked, and ridiculed ; the ordinances uninfluential ; the fellowship of the church unprofitable ; prayer itself uninteresting ; and, finally, the ministry is forsaken. In all the process, there was a clamorous complaint of barrenness, but no labour was spent in the husbandry of the soul. It is necessary for such to know, that this royal road to religious comfort and improvement, if ever it was open to mortals upon earth, has for a long time been shut up. None are allowed to pass by that way into heaven now. It is useless to expect too much from ministers ; their services, however faithful, can never relieve the people from the necessity of studious application. This is ordained to be an attendant on all ordinances of whatever kind. This being forgotten, their utility is lost, their sanctity is despised, the officers become grieved and insulted, and thence, as from a fountain, streams of evil flow into the churches.

The third error to be noted, is a false view of ministerial faithfulness. This must, in many cases, be extremely painful. It may not be a mere exhortation to the performance of a duty,

but a rebuke for some allowed sin. Here there is some difficulty in perceiving the true character of the act. Like children under the rod, the eyes are so full of tears, and their hearts so full of feeling, that they can see nothing clearly. They are accustomed to reprove in wrath, and to justify an unrighteous anger by referring to supposed offences; and it is not in their power to explain the action of their pastor, without employing the motives that govern themselves. They forget that he has been selected to stand before them with the message of God, which is quite as painful for him to deliver as for them to hear. He is therefore animated, through the disease of their imagination, with feelings that nothing can justify. His sermons are charged with personality. His visits with undue freedom. His intimations with injustice or inaccuracy. And if he happen to be ardent, though most affectionate, in his feeling; the evil soon ripens into sin; and a soul is hazarded by expulsion from the church, or a minister is fettered and made useless, by embarrassment and dishonour.

The fourth error, is a love of flattery. It is generally brought in from the world, at least, so it is supposed; for it is wonderful how it could originate in the church. At first it appears in

the subject like a mere stain, resulting from former corruptions ; but in time it swells ; then it ulcerates ; and, finally, it spreads through the whole constitution of the soul, and defies every human remedy. It is awful to think, how bitter, and lancinating, are the pangs which attend the progress of the disease. It will generally render the patient unfit for any religious society, and still more unfit for any religious service, long before it has reached the point of fatality. Hence, in the most early stages of the disease, it is hard to cure ; but, when it has once reached its crisis, nothing can prevent a fatal issue but the Omnipotent power of sovereign grace.

There are three facts which give this malady a more than ordinary terror.

1. It is gratified in so many various ways. Sometimes it loves to have the claims of duty stated mildly, so as not to imply the existence of sin in the things which are allowed. At other times they must be painted grossly, in order to show the patient's evangelical zeal. At times the afflicted creature will wish to hear the evidences of piety urged with the utmost delicacy, that his taste may be known, and no one suppose that he is not an inheritor of grace. Then, again, they must be enforced

with the utmost severity, excluding all besides himself; that his piety may appear as much above that of other men, as the heaven is above the earth. In one subject it assumes a doctrinal form, and he loves to be reminded of his election. In another, it takes a legal form, and he must be told of his liberty and works. In the ignorant it produces a burning thirst for vulgarity. In the learned, a lingering desire after an useless decoration of style. Now it combines the mistakes of the poor, and presently it will be seen ripened to rottenness amongst the crimes of the wealthy. In a word, it has this peculiarity, confined to no place or station upon earth, it is capable of producing its terrible effects in every heart; from the monarch, to the meanest subject in his empire.

2. When once it is clearly developed, it has the dreadful power of turning all healthy food into support for its own pollution. In this may be traced a tremendous ingenuity which never fails, when the occasion suits, to turn reproof into matter for compliment; and the kindest expostulation and forbearance, into congratulations or insult, as the case demands. To the point of humility and health it will not be brought, this is regarded as a state of shame and death, it loves to be, and will exalt

itself, even in the house of God, and at the place of prayer. Every exercise of worship, even the most humiliating, is used in the same way; the sufferer must be regarded as the most penitent, the most prayerful, the most zealous, the most spiritual, and the most useful; or the act that strips him of his appearance, is resented as an insult too great to be forgiven.

But finally, the worst fact relates to the claim which it exacts from the officers in the church. This consists in a direct tax on official faithfulness. The reverence due to their awful responsibility is forgotten, in the eager demand for undeserved reputation; and nothing will serve or gratify the diseased appetite, but a sacrifice of truth, and a compromise of principle, which involves the messenger of divine mercy in the hazard of a heavy condemnation.

It is not pleasant to dwell upon the many calamities which this terrible disease has entailed on the church of Christ; they are too multifarious to be enumerated, and too awful to be minutely described. It will therefore be better to contemplate.

Lastly. The love of power. This error bears some affinity to the foregoing, but still it has a specific peculiarity. It originates in the natural pride of the human heart, like the other, but

the source of gratification is different. The former is delighted with appearance ; in this, appearance is often despised. The object of desire is the control of men and measures in the church. The direction of its worship, the arrangement of its ordinances, the comfort of its members, the disposal of its funds, or perhaps the appropriation of its credit to some individual or earthly purpose. It has assumed every possible form in which human policy can be cast, and is the great source of all the evils to be found in the established churches. In these it has assumed the gigantic form of a national policy. It has corrupted the ministry by the introduction of hirelings, debased the church by compulsory exaction on the people, and rendered the kingdom of Jesus, a base and dishonourable instrument of earthly rule.

From this tremendous degradation, the voluntary churches of our land, are, if they will but be true to themselves, most happily delivered. And if the thing be taken in its true light, the scope for indulging the folly which they supply, is merely sufficient to expose it to the most pitiable contempt. Still there are sometimes found individuals who are sufficiently weak to run the hazard. For, though there is nothing worth controlling in a body of

men for the most part poor, and in the worship of the church which ought to be entirely spiritual; yet the little point of eminence given to one who holds the trust deed, or keeps the church book, or distributes the alms, or superintends the school, or gives out the hymns in the desk, becomes a mark of the greatest brother; and, therefore, it may be sought, and when gained, it will sometimes be held to the discomfort of the whole.

In some circles the question has actually come into discussion, whether this power in the church should be aristocratical, or democratical? That is, whether it should be held by a few of the highest, or whether it should be held by all the members? This proves, sufficiently, that the evil has become of considerable importance. The consideration of two facts, however, will be sufficient to show its absurdity.

For, first, it is not the duty to be performed which is the object of ambition, so much as the desire of performing it in a dictatorial spirit, and without rendering an account to the brethren. Holding the deeds, keeping the books, and the arrangement of services, &c. are all acts of kindness done to the whole. If properly regarded, they would be deemed points of trust,

and servitude. When performed in the spirit of Christian love, and with a frankness that secured the confidence of the whole, instead of being regarded with jealousy, and held with hostile feeling, they were rewarded with gratitude, and imposed with confidence and respect. This love of power, therefore, has this absurdity and evil in it; that it changes an important service into a real injury: and the reward of grateful respect into suspicion and disquietude.

Secondly. The idea of power is entirely out of place. To a certain extent it may be entertained in the world; though there, for the most part, it is a mere shadow. But, in the church, it is forbidden. When the disciples disputed who should be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, our Lord said: "unless ye be converted from this wicked feeling, and become as little children, to whom power is no matter of solicitude, you shall never enter it. In the kingdoms of the earth, the greatest have rule; but he that is the greatest among you, let him be the servant of all. Be not many masters, one is your master, even the Christ, all ye are brethren." These expressions are not to be regarded as mere casual hints, but solemn developments of one great principle; which is,

that in the church of Christ, the members, and officers, have no power to make laws; no one of them alone, nor all of them together, have any right to legislate: their whole business is to obey. They are all servants, and they are all united for the discharge of duty; even their interests are to be sought by the direction of their common Lord. For every thing they do, they must give an account to God. What then can exceed the absurdity of conflicting the point of power; when, in reality, no power whatever is permitted to exist?

The very object of contention is, in itself, so vain and worthless; that the folly it occasions would never have been noticed here, were it not for the practical evils that result from it. The deeds are often smuggled up in this absurd spirit until the trusts are run out, and cannot be renewed, and often the property is lost. This occurred in the town of A——, and the property fell to a lady, who, refusing to renew the title, said: “if you choose to pull your meeting down, I will make you a present of the bricks to build elsewhere;” but if not, I will pull it down myself, and you shall have nothing.” In this way, property, beyond all calculation, has been lost; by servants of God, who could ill afford to subscribe what they did

in their poverty. In respect to the books, and accounts, similar evils occur. The foolish desire to keep them without giving any account of their stewardship to the church, often forces the whole into confusion; breaks the confidence of the subscribers; provokes suspicion where it is not deserved; and, finally, the resources of the church are cut off, the interest languishes, and the minister is obliged to leave. In the arrangement of services, and the works of mercy, the error is productive of endless confusion; the officers are afraid to move lest they should produce strife. The minister is thwarted in the measures that lay nearest his heart; and, when the evil becomes gross, and violent, his life is filled with misery, and ended without usefulness.

In fact, the scene of such a conflict, can never be enriched with the blessing of God. The Spirit will not dwell there. The world will never respect religion when presented in such an aspect. It is altogether unbrotherly and repulsive. And with all the misery it brings to the saints, and all the ruin it entails upon sinners, this base and paltry love of power has no advantage connected with it that a good man ought to desire; but whenever it comes to prevail in the person of a bad one, it is sure to

be the ruin of his soul, if not of the church with which he is united.

It is to this source of war and fighting that we may generally trace the impatience of members with each other. One steps forward, without modesty, and grasps some empty shadow of consequence ; and others shrink back in disgust, as though they were themselves disappointed. But it is not desirable to multiply illustrations. It is hoped that the cases, at least, the gross cases of its prevalence, and ravages, are very few ; and that the guilty individuals, when once their sin and folly have been set before them, will seek, by repentance, the forgiveness of their insulted Saviour ; and, then, whatever occasional infirmity may exhibit, the love of power, shall no longer be named, as a motive allowed in the churches.

One fact, whilst it accounts for the existence, might urge the brethren to despise, and expel the error from their societies. The church polity of our land stands out before them in a form so very oppressive and unlovely, that the fear of its evils forces them into the opposite extreme. It is very afflictive, certainly, to see the religion of Jesus thus dishonoured, and the confidence of God's people betrayed, by sophistry, concealed under the most imposing protes-

tations of truth and piety. Let it not be forgotten, however, that a diseased sinner is never cured at once. If rescued from destruction, he bears with him marks of his fall. This was the case in the early churches, and will be the case in all, whatever be their form or character. If the brethren have to suffer, therefore, let them be very careful that they do not sin. To this they will fearfully approximate, when the indulgence of a worldly ambition in the church is regarded with more of resentment than compassionate aversion. But should they be left by restraining mercy, to linger and scramble for the base delusion, their sin will have no excuse. Shielded by the gracious authority of the Saviour, they have turned away from the enfeebled threats of mitred majesty, and asserted the equality of brethren, and fellow-servants of the Most High God. On this ground they may claim, and enjoy, the full felicity of Christian fellowship. Here they have no reason to be moved either by the lust, or the dread of power. But who shall compute the evils that must follow when they shall forget the value of their mercy. Infidelity will then stand by, and watch the advance of the church's shame, with bitter, if not with triumphant, exultation.

In respect to the whole of these errors, and others that might be named, let it not be supposed that the pastors and the deacons are the only sufferers. On them, indeed, much of the ill effects of the indulgence must fall, and with many an hour of tearful solicitude they will watch the painful indications of their existence. But, as they are violations of divine law, unless forgiveness be obtained through the blood of Jesus, they will be followed by divine punishment. Their influence, too, will be felt as wide as the circle through which the infected individual moves ; and he will thus increase the delusion and danger of wicked men. But, within the families of professors of this class, the most baneful influence of their folly will be seen ; and, not unfrequently, a most appropriate judgement will be realized. The children, who learn through such an example, will often prove the most abandoned characters. Religion has no such opponents as those who have been thus trained amongst the vices of professors. Their hearts are steeled against human means, they are merely accessible to Omnipotence.

Now and then it is found, that some one, or more, of these errors, have proved fatal to a Christian church. And this is to be regarded as a real benefit rather than otherwise. Not

that it existed ; but that the body which was thus diseased could not live. And this must be the case with voluntary churches : for the moment they lose their credit, and offend God, they lose their whole ground of confidence and support. From that moment no wealth or power can preserve them. The leprosy will eat out the strength of its walls, and pillars, until the temple sinks in ruin to the ground. Hence the evils are more quickly seen, and more speedily punished, in the voluntary churches ; than when the errors and offenders are protected by compulsory legislation ; and hence their superiority. They are not without cause for grief and penitence ; still, the ills to be deplored there, are comparatively few, and infantine ; and, can never go unreprieved. Hence, God has graciously made them the depositories of his holy doctrine, his healthy discipline, and his divine oracles. In these, the light of the world, and the salt of the earth, are still to be preserved. Let the light be trimmed, and the salt be purified ; that the beam of the one may be clearly seen, and the pungency of the other felt. The purity of their creed, and the simplicity of their constitution, are advantages ; but these are not sufficient for their work. “To their faith they must add virtue ; to their vir-

tue, knowledge; to their knowledge, temperance; to their temperance, patience; to their patience, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity: for, if these things be in them and abound; they will make them to be neither barren, nor unfruitful, in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is to be observed, that the points which have been considered, how advantageous soever when duly regarded, are not to be received as things expedient. They are in the highest sense laws of God, and cannot be disregarded without sin. Each requirement is an expression of infinite wisdom, which infinite power is determined to sustain. It matters little in what peculiar way it has been perpetrated, the dishonour of God by the contempt of his commandments, will never pass unpunished. If, in the vanity of our hearts, we presume, like the Papist, to improve the law; the result will resemble the reward of a lunatick, who painted his eyeballs, to increase their beauty, but produced irrecoverable blindness. But this is not the only point of danger. If the authoritative nature of divine appointments be forgotten, it will lead to levity in their treatment, if not to their final rejection. In the early churches,

the scarcity of God's word was an excuse, and yet they have been sorely corrected, some have even ceased to exist, and from others the glory has departed. For the Christian churches in England no such apology can be offered. God has furnished them so abundantly with his word, that the Sun of Righteousness may be said to enlighten their path with the glory of his mid-day beam. To each church, therefore, the words of Moses have a solemn and direct application. "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law, which are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this fearful and glorious name — **THE LORD THY GOD**. Then the Lord will make thy plagues wonderful, and the plagues of thy seed, even great plagues, and of long continuance, and sore sicknesses, and of long continuance." It is this awful view of Christian precepts, that gives so much majesty to the following exhortation of the apostle Paul.

"Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord my dearly beloved. Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanks-

giving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are dignified, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report ; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do ; and the God of peace shall be with you." Phil. iv. 1, 4—9.

10. Besides the laws which relate to particular churches, there are others which embrace the more general affairs of the kingdom of heaven.

In these, many individual churches, may unite in undertakings too vast to be carried on by any one of them alone, but quite within the compass of their combined strength. These, in the present day, have grown to eminent importance and usefulness ; and the great object must now be, to reduce them all to such a system of management as will give them a healthy vigour in themselves, and render them a constant benefit to the churches by which they are supported.

But, on the threshold of this inquiry, several difficulties have to be encountered. The number of collections has become exceedingly burdensome; and, hence, the demand for money is made too prominent in the churches. The conflicting claims, of different societies have placed them too much in the light of competitors; and given them an aspect unfriendly to religious improvement. The dread of foreign influence, has rendered some reluctant to unite. And further, the want of union, and a wise distribution of labour, has diminished the strength of the churches; embarrassed their movements; and destroyed, through over exertion, some of the most valuable and devoted labourers. Much of the ill effects of these evils, has of late been diminished, and the following hints are intended to facilitate the advance to perfect health.

The easiest way to encounter these difficulties, will be found in a strict adherence to the law of God, as far as it embraces the matters of duty and embarrassment. Perhaps the whole of the business before us may not be included in any expression of the divine will; if that be the case, the point must be determined by a Christian and prayerful regard to the principles of prudence: but, wherever the

will of God has been expressed, let that be observed as law, and loved as beneficial, for this will always supply the prudence which is determined by infinite wisdom.

There are some points, at least, and these of no small importance, in which the law of God respecting such engagements has been determined; and these, when properly considered, will help us to determine others. For,

1. The will of God is clearly made known respecting the unity of the church. Hence, it has its descriptions in the singular number, and not in the plural, whenever the whole community of the saints is the subject of discourse. It is also called the kingdom of heaven, and the kingdom of God: and the Saviour uses the expression (my kingdom) to represent it as one, distinguished from all others in the world. Nor was this confined to the saints in Jerusalem, or to the believing Jews; it comprised all men, of all nations, who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Scattered over the face of the world, they might be of all classes, from every station in society, of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue; they might be endowed with different gifts, and employed in different spheres of duty, like the different members of the human frame; still, though

they were many members, yet they were one body in Christ, and members one of another.

This, if from nothing else, would be manifest from the apostolical salutations. In all these, the believers, who are directly addressed, receive an individuality sufficiently distinct for the purpose entertained; but the very expression by which they are described, conveys, at the same time, the idea that there are persons of the same character, elsewhere, equal in privilege and honour, with those that are there named. Thus, in the salutation of the Romans, Paul uses the article distinctive of the place, not of the persons. To all *those*, beloved of God, called saints, *which* are in Rome; implying, that there were others beloved of God, called saints in other places. *The* church, or assembly of God, *which* is in Corinth, implies another, of which it was but a part; and, the churches composed of residents in Galatia, implies the existence of others of the same kind, not constituted of men belonging to that nation. Thus, in every case, the church receives the distinctness of a member, but not the lonely destitution of a separate existence.

But, further, it is impossible that the churches should have ever been reduced to that state of divided separation during the lives of the

apostles ; because they were not only the subjects of one Lord, and of one faith, and of one baptism, and of one God and Father of all, and therefore had one divine law to which they were subject, and which made them one in their obedience ; but they were dependent on the ministration of his inspired servants for the knowledge they had of the Saviour's history, and the way of salvation ; and, in them alone, they possessed infallible guides in the path of duty. They were, therefore, one in their dependence on apostolical ministrations.

It is true, that the individual parts of the body of Christ were soon greatly multiplied ; and that the individuals composing it were scattered nearly over the face of the whole earth ; sometimes a solitary sojourner having learned the truth at Jerusalem or elsewhere, might have returned with the precious blessing to live and die in some distant land enjoying its benefits alone. Still though cut off from the fellowship of the brethren, he was a member of the body ; and derived his life, consolation, and reward, from the same fountain of eternal mercy. But ordinarily this was not the case. A single converted soul entering a city, or a kingdom, was generally the means of many being converted to

God. These, perhaps, were separated from the great body of the saints, by deserts, mountains, seas, and the difficulty of personal intercourse. Still they were called by the same name, inspired by the same hope, and animated with the same general affection. They were born of the same Spirit, redeemed by the same Saviour, and destined to dwell in the same paradise, for ever and ever. They loved the same things, hated the same evils, lived on the same bounty, maintained the same conflict, and rejoiced in the same expected triumph; hence they were in the highest sense one body, and in this united capacity, they are called the church of God, purchased with his blood.

Finally, let it be observed, that nothing which did not affect the vital claim to piety, was ever suffered to diminish the unity of the church. Difference of nation and of social privilege is expressly forbidden. Without any regard to Jew, or Greek, or bond, or free, they are all one in Christ Jesus. Mistakes on points of religious duty are not allowed to interfere with this unity. For the saints at Antioch, differed from those of Jerusalem; and the saints in the same church, differed from each other; even the apostles were not always unanimous in judge-

ment; yet in no case is it made the ground of exclusion. Each professed to know but in part, and all therefore became students in the same school. If any thing appeared to impeach the profession of real piety, the law of faithful discipline was brought with solemn majesty to do its work. This was protected with the utmost jealousy and love. On this the whole union was founded, by this it was preserved. On this, in each case, the final judgement will determine. Hence the violation of this was a ground for exclusion, and nothing else. This was required at the entrance, and the consistency of this was exacted through all the advances of the Christian life. This was the term of fellowship, and the absence of this was the only ground on which this fellowship could be withheld. From whence we conclude, as we might also do from many other sources, that the will of God is, that his kingdom shall be one, even as his name is one.

From hence may be inferred the obligation to Christian faithfulness. Since the universal communion of the church is founded on sincere piety; every church, and every Christian is bound to require it of every other. He must make it a constant demand of every one whom he admits as a Christian. He must make the

demand most simple and prominent, and place it before all other considerations ; for if he neglect this, or wilfully obscure it, whatever benefit he may seem to obtain in other respects, he will offend God, deceive his brethren, and increase the delusion of a fallen world.

From hence also we may learn the obligation under which we are laid to honour this piety wherever it is found. It may be in the heart of a king, or in the bosom of his slave ; but, wherever it be, though cramped and encumbered with dishonour, care, and imperfection : still it is the mighty work of God's eternal mercy. It is the seal of inheritance given to a child of God, and it must stand before all other considerations upon earth. He who possesses it, whatever the disadvantage of his station, can never be regarded as separate from the church. "For, in the day when I number up my jewels, he shall be mine saith the Lord, and I will spare him as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

From hence, also, we may learn, that whatever the object that may employ their energy, the distinction that may be needful to individualize their exertions, or whatever the imperfection of the present knowledge of mankind : no society of Christians can destroy the unity of the church,

or disregard the principles on which it is founded, or neglect in all their labours for God and souls to place it in the greatest prominence ; without offending God, betraying the confidence of believers, and diminishing the spiritual blessings of mankind.

From hence may be seen, finally, the point of the apostle's admonition to Christian modesty. For, I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think, but to think and examine himself until his thoughts become sobered into a healthy modesty, estimating his worth and importance according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office, so we being many are one body in Christ ; and every one members one of another. Let each member maintain the unconscious usefulness of perfect health. Having gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophesy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith that is found in the brethren, not breaking them down with the things they cannot bear : or the ministry of a deacon, let us wait on that ministration ; or he that teacheth, on teaching ; or he that exhorteth,

on exhortation ; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ; he that ruleth, with diligence ; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness. As an eye, an ear, a hand, or foot ; let each man be in his place, and perform the office to which he is appointed, without either pain or palsy ; just like the unconsciousness of healthy organic motion.

From the connexion, it should seem that though this was written to the Romans directly, yet it must be considered as binding on every part of “ *the body of Christ ;*” and therefore, upon the societies and institutions in which its members are united. Whether their immediate object be the salvation of men at home, or abroad ; the comfort of the poor, or the improvement of the churches ; in each, and in every case, the agents of those societies are bound by this law, to act as parts of the whole body of Christ. Not admitting of an irregular and painful motion, like a paralyzed or dislocated limb ; but, maintaining, in each place, the easy usefulness of a healthy member ; which is made and preserved, to be used as an instrument, and to be worn as a decoration by the whole body.

2. The word of God affords many clear directions respecting the general consultation of

the church. The necessity of this, as a means of performing the duty imposed, is enough to render it obligatory on Christians; because, when a principal object is required, the means which God has rendered necessary to accomplish it, are also required by the same authority. If, then, the whole church is bound to act as one family, subject to the laws of one household, and under the care of one parent; there must be some means of conference, or consultation; some way in which the children may understand the purposes and feelings of each other. Consequently, it is not to be expected that such consultations would be positively enjoined in the Scripture. The use of them is implied in the law which demands the unity of the church. But, still, as it respects the occasions, the means, and the method, of conducting them, much may be learned from the inspired examples recorded in the Acts of the Apostles.

The obligation thus to unite in consulting the means for advancing the kingdom of heaven, if it were not implied as a means essential to its duties, would be almost demonstrated from the antiquity and constancy of the practice. For though a single part of the church might have been deluded into a point of sinful expedi-

ency, and this may have prevailed for a time, yet it is hard to suppose that God should have suffered the whole body of his people to have thus sunk into error from the very beginning. The truth seems to be this, since the death of our Lord the providence of God has constantly brought the church into such conditions, as made its unity manifest by the common danger of its interests and members : and these members have thus been made to feel their common necessity ; and to consult for their common safety and success.

The word council has for many ages been appropriated to the description of these united consultations of the church. The word has, moreover, this advantage, it brings down through all the alterations of time, the real nature of those assemblies ; for a council is an assembly met for mutual conference ; it supposes the right, and the need of consultation, to exist in the whole and every part : it is not a meeting of rulers exalted with kingly power, but of servants employed in the performance of common duties. The object of their consultation was not to make laws, but to understand and obey those that were already made for them. The council of the church could never with propriety be denominated legislative, it was nothing

more than the consultation of many brethren or fellow servants, who held one master even Christ.

In this form, with more or less simplicity, the act of consultation has been constantly performed. But the wicked neglect of its entire subordination to the law of God, has often destroyed the intended benefit, and made the results of conference between its own members, bitterly afflictive to the body of Christ. The cause of all the evil is not in the existence of the thing, but in the change of its object and temper; its brotherly character becomes merged in a legislative authority, and the tenderness of fraternal advice, is lost in the harsh and often absurd decrees of those who exalt themselves as gods in the presence of their brethren. In this position a noble genius, and an ambitious generosity, have often been exposed to the severest disappointment and ridicule: but the mutual consultation of those who are mutually bound to extend the triumphs of redeeming mercy still remains, a matter of the most serious obligation, as well as a source of the richest benefit.

The nature, objects and method of this Christian consultation, will be seen with tolerable distinctness, if we just trace the several instances of its use, which are recorded in the

Acts of the Apostles. The first was occasioned by the vacancy in the apostolate through the ruin of Judas Iscariot, which was finally filled up by the appointment of Matthias.* The second was the pentecost, for then a special convention of the brethren was held, when the Spirit was poured out from on high.† The third was a time of affliction, when Peter was seized in the temple, and combined in its object special prayer, as well as special consultation.‡ The fourth was occasioned by the necessity of assistants to take the care of the poor, and the temporal things, when seven deacons were elected.|| A fifth occurred in the case of Peter, when the great question of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles was determined.§ A sixth was occasioned by the dispute at Antioch, respecting the duty of circumcising the Gentiles.¶ Others are hinted at in the epistles, but not distinctly recorded, probably, because they were not important for our instruction.

From these cases several facts may be determined. As first, that a general convention of believers was called, whenever God, in his

* Acts i. 15.

|| Acts vi. 9.

† Acts ii. 1.

§ Acts xi. 1.

‡ Acts iv. 23. with v. 31.

¶ Acts xv. 1.

providence, made it necessary. In the case of Matthias, and the deacons, they met as electors ; to choose from amongst the members of the church, individuals to fill important offices. At the pentecost, and in the persecution, they were brought together by common danger and necessity. In the case of Peter, and the dispute at Antioch, they had to consult on the settlement of important points of practical duty. First, whether the Gentiles should be taught ; and secondly, whether the believing Gentiles should be compelled to obey the law of Moses. Indeed, they were like plain men, involved in one great interest, and united in one great toil, who laboured apart, and consulted together ; just as they were compelled by providential arrangements. Secondly, that each meeting received a peculiar character from the peculiar occasion which called for it. It was marked with solemn and religious feeling ; but, the degree of religious exercise, was regulated by the matter in hand. When an election was required they elected ; when consultation, they consulted with free and friendly discussion. If explanation was required, they explained ; and when the occasion was a heavy affliction, which they had no power to remove, they remained in deep prostration before God, until he afforded relief.

Thirdly, all these meetings were privileged by the highest possible human authority, and the greatest created advantages. The apostles were all men of great moral worth ; of the most unquestionable devotedness ; they were placed beyond the influence of earthly policies ; whatever they determined would be despised in the arrangements of the empire : still, everything pressed upon them with a force which must have fixed all their attention on the point in hand, and drawn out their utmost energies. It was the age of the church's infancy, or rather the period of its struggle for existence. For this moment of mighty trial they were trained, to it they were called, and in consequence of its claims, they were specially endowed with miraculous powers. As the constitution of the church was then to be formed for its earthly existence, and the law given for its perpetual governance, the apostles who attended all these meetings were rendered infallible ; and their decisions invested with an authority, which is much more solemn and binding, than any possessed by the councils of the church which have been subsequently convened.

Fourthly. Nothing is more manifest in the whole of these general meetings than the spirit of deep subordination with which they

are tintured. In all of them, the will of God, without a single sophistical fetch, is made their only law. If the business be an election, it is done in the deepest prostration and prayer. If they are in distress, they wait in the dependence of children at their Father's feet. If they have to settle a point of duty and discipline, all they inquire for is the will of their Lord. The question of utility never arises. Nothing is recommended on the ground of earthly expedience. It seemed good to them, because, as the arguments prove, God had shown it to be his will. They consulted, and prayed, as fellow-servants and brethren: and in no other capacity whatever. Hence we have the very strongest proof, that the legislative and divine authority assumed by councils of a more recent date, is a false assumption, invented for political purposes, to injure and abuse mankind.

Fifthly. From this view of the general consultations of the church, it will be very clear, that the idea of a legislative authority is no more to be entertained in them, than in the meetings of any particular part. The church which met at Antioch, was an assembly of brethren beloved in the Lord, and the apostles and messengers who met to consult at Jerusalem, bore the same character. They were servants and chil-

dren bound by the will of their Father who is in heaven. This was their highest and most distinctive character; the infallibility given to a few, was nothing more than an endowment given to one child, for the purpose of guiding the conduct of the whole family. In this way they had recourse to all means for shortening the process. They communicated by letter; those who could not attend the assembly elected and sent their messengers; they respected the decisions of the whole, as the pious and accurate interpretation of the will of God; but the only *authority* to which they submitted, was that to which the whole universe is subjected—the law of the eternal Creator.

The best exposition we have of these transactions is afforded in the epistle to the Galatians. In this we see the difficulty respecting circumcision revived in a way which proves that the church was not unanimous in the opinion entertained on this subject. The apostle refers to the authority on which he, himself, proclaimed the doctrine of justification by faith. It was not on the authority of the church, nor on the decree of the council, but on the revelation of Jesus Christ, to whom both

church and council were subjected.* He states his entire independence of their decree in the performance of his work.† That when he was there he never thought of receiving such authority.‡ That such authority was never required of him by the churches, though he was unknown to them personally; the proof of his inspiration being given to all, they glorified, not him, for his work, but God in him, for the authority and power he displayed.§ The whole of his courage, and the whole of their confidence, were thus reposed on the authority of God alone.

Still he did refer to the assembly at Jerusalem, but after fourteen years of further labour. What, then, was the nature of that reference? Why, first, it was not an ordinary act, he went up by special revelation, for a special purpose.§ The whole of the transaction is not recorded: the special object of the mission is not very fully known: but whilst he was there he communicated to them the glad tidings he proclaimed to the Gentiles.|| The

* Gal. i. 12.

† Gal. i. 17.

‡ Gal. i. 19.

§ Gal. i. 21, 24.

|| Gal. ii. 1, 2.

|| Chap. ii. 2.

reason for this was, his care, lest he should teach, or should have taught, what was vain. The decision is exemplified in the case of Titus, who was a Greek, and not required to be circumcised.* This seems to refer to the council held respecting this question, and the time agrees with it. Hence we learn, first, that the occasion for this conference was the dispute raised by false brethren, who sought to bring them into bondage.† Secondly, that when a dispute arose, the apostle, though sustained by the confidence of an infallible inspiration, would, nevertheless, have meekness to submit to a general consultation. Thirdly, that this consultation added nothing to the perfect knowledge with which he was inspired. And, fourthly, that, though he was thus supported, he never assumed any other authority than that of a fellow-creature, who confidently declared the law by which the Creator had subjected all things unto himself. And hence we may learn that those who despise the consultations of the church, and those who corrupt them with a wicked love of power, are both alike opposed to the will of God, and liable to the marks of his displeasure.

* Chap. ii. 3.

† Chap. ii. 4.

3. God has, in great mercy, revealed the sympathy with which this mutual consultation of the churches should be animated. In this the word of divine truth defines, with great clearness, both the occasions and the nature of the sympathy.

1. The occasions for this sympathy are in general all those events in providence which relate to the spiritual health and happiness of the whole body. But some are more particularly exhibited.

First, this sympathy is enjoined in those cases of spiritual danger, to which the churches are liable, in consequence of imperfect views of divine truth. In this they felt and acted as though the church were one body. As soon, therefore, as the gospel had spread, and churches were formed in Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch; Barnabus was sent from Jerusalem to instruct, exhort, and confirm them.* When churches had been formed in many other countries, Paul and Barnabus went out again; to visit the brethren in every city where they had preached the word, and to see how they did.† It was not the care of one, but the care of all the churches, that rested on

* Acts xi. 22.

† Acts xv. 36.

their minds ; as the parts of one great family, requiring perfect instruction. Hence, the precise, and fervent exhortations that are given in the general epistles of Peter, of James, of Jude, and of John. As the union of individual believers in one church, so the union of individual churches in the whole body, determined the combined solicitude of the whole, on the teaching and edification of the several parts.

Secondly. This mutual sympathy was further awakened by the danger to which the churches were exposed, from the encroachments of worldly policy and unfaithfulness. From thence proceeded the concern to secure the faithful discharge of discipline, both in the admission of members, the election of officers, and the purity of fraternal intercourse. The two epistles of Paul to the Corinthians, are specimens of this concern, and of the personal disinterestedness with which it was cherished. The exhortations given to Timothy and Titus, respecting the appointment of bishops and deacons, are of the same kind. The epistles to the seven churches in the Revelations of John are full of this solicitude, and the other epistles abound in exhortations to that kind of fidelity which must form the basis of mutual confidence in the whole.

Thirdly. This mutual sympathy was greatly displayed in cases of poverty, especially in those produced by faithful consecration to their Lord. By this, when the church was principally situated in Judea, they voluntarily submitted to have but one treasury, and made all their possessions common. Every thing was laid down at the apostles' feet to supply the wants of the whole; and, when the churches were multiplied in other countries, and those in Judea were visited with famine, those that had abundance, communicated of their fulness to them that had need; and so produced an equality.* In this, as in other things, they acted together as one great congregation of men, who believed, desired, and suffered the same things.

Fourthly. This mutual sympathy was greatly awakened by their mutual danger from the persecution of the world. Hence, the solicitude everywhere shown for the safety of each other. This drew forth their courage to a point of magnificence which has never been equalled, for serene devotedness, by any thing that has yet been exhibited in the fields of war. From hence proceed, all those glowing exhortations to constancy and faithfulness, which

* Acts xi. 27.

I Cor. xvi. 2.

are founded on the hope of celestial glory, and which distinguish the apostolical epistles from all other writings in the world. The epistle to the Hebrews is one entire and magnificent example of this sympathy with the saints in persecution; and the passages that might be selected from the other parts of inspired truth, exceed the noblest strains of human poetry, in the chaste and magnanimous feeling they exemplify. II Cor. iv. & v. chapters. II Tim. vi. chap. I Peter iv. 12—19. Rev. ii. & iii. chapters.

Fifthly. The sympathy of the whole church was seen, in the joy that was felt when the comfort, spirituality, and success, of any particular part, became manifest. Hence the glowing emotion, with which the apostles yearned over these churches, which became their glory and joy. Hence the frequency with which they make mention of them in their prayers, and bless God on their behalf. And this feeling of the apostles was not confined to them. The fellow-labourers, and the private Christians, partook of it in so large a degree, that they seem to be animated with one soul. They had One in heaven, touched with the feeling of all their infirmities, and they felt themselves bound to be touched with the infirmities of each other. In heaven there was joy over

one sinner that repented, and it appeared in them guilty not to rejoice too.

These specimens of Christian sympathy may serve to guide the churches in seeking after opportunities for indulging it. For, though the point to be considered now, is rather the obligation which is involved in the example of inspired men, and churches under their care, which received their approbation; the practice of this duty will be found so much incorporated with real improvement and felicity in spiritual things, and so conducive to raise the mind of man above the care and pollution of the world; that when once a true believer comes to be at home in its exercise, he will be compelled to call it an indulgence rather than a duty.

This statement will be more fully proved, if two passages be considered, which serve to explain the nature of this Christian sympathy. The first is in the 13th chap. of the 1st epistle to the Corinthians. The feeling is here described as it lives and acts in the soul of a single saint, without any regard to a particular station or office. It is not the paltry smoothness of encroaching selfishness, but the glowing flame of Christian charity, extending its generous influence to whomsoever it touches. Hence, the man is supposed to be placed in a

great variety of circumstances which call it into exercise. If he suffer, charity makes him suffer long. If he see another needing benefit, charity makes the Christian kind, and submit to be used. If he see another happy, the charitable Christian will not envy him. If he be himself exalted, and fortunate; charity will not suffer him to be vain or proud. If mingled with mankind in social freedom, he will not behave unseemly. He will not seek to gratify his selfishness, though he be a necessitous creature like other men. If insulted, he will not be easily provoked. If wise, he will contrive no evil. When iniquity is visible, it will not make him rejoice; though the truth may be unpleasant, it will make him glad. He that has charity, will bear all that can be borne; he will believe all that can be believed; he will hope when any ground for hope can by possibility be discovered; and he will endure all things that can be endured. He is one whose generous tenderness is touched with the effect which any thing may have upon another's mind, and acts as one who sympathizes, who suffers with him.

The second passage is given in the 12th chapter of the Romans, from the 9th verse. In this the same feeling is described, but with

some peculiar modifications. The whole of the description is founded on the facts, that all the duties there mentioned are admitted so to be, and that the principle of love is professed by every Christian. If then, the acts described be duties in themselves, the love professed would naturally give some modification to their performance. This, then, is the point of the apostles exhortation. You are bound by divine law to reject evil, and seek good, to exercise a brotherly love, to honour those to whom honour is due, to fulfil your engagements, to hope, to suffer tribulation, to pray, relieve the distressed, and to entertain strangers, &c. &c. But you profess in addition this Christian love, which is avowed as the willing friendship of the heart. Let this therefore be without dissimulation; and like a sincere affection, let it give perfectness, and vivacity, to every performance. Do not forsake evil merely, let your affection be shown by your *abhorring* that which is evil; by your *cleaving* as if glued to that which is good. Do every thing as though you loved the work and the persons for whom it is performed. In brotherly love, being tenderly affectionate; in honour, preferring one another; in business not slothful, but fervent in spirit, as one who loves it, and feels that he is serving the Lord; re-

joicing in hope as those who love the coming joy ; in tribulation patient, like those who love the object for whom they suffer ; in prayer, instant, like men who pray for those they love ; holding fellowship with the saints, not in their hope and comforts merely, but in their necessities also ; seeking with earnestness occasions for hospitality. Let every thing be inspired with this undisguised affection, bless even those that curse you, bless and curse not. Rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Let the same sympathy be extended also to each other, not minding high things, but condescending even to men of low estate ; be not wise in your own conceits. Let your sincere love make you willing to recompence evil for evil to no man, but rather to devise the things which all shall admire : if it be possible, live in peace with all mankind. Not avenging yourselves, beloved, but rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord. If, therefore, thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink ; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head, which would soften the blade of a sword. If your love be sincere, do not be conquered by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This Christian charity, therefore, is the root out of which the sympathy of the saints must spring. It is placed before all talents, gifts, and services, that can be possessed, or done, in the church; because it is essential to their worth, and will exist in heaven; the bond of all union, and an element in all the happiness, which are there to be enjoyed. It survives the exercise both of faith and hope, and will grow more perfect, in the perfect knowledge of eternity. But even here it is destined to grow to a state of eminent strength, beauty, and fruitfulness, and one of its principal productions is, the sympathy of the saints. It is not confined to one exercise of duty, nor to one of exertion. It must blend the interests, and desires of members in a single church, animating all their worship and intercourse. It must also bind churches to each other, inspiring all their energies and exertions. It must raise the saints above the paltry dominion of party and denominational interests. By this, the inhabitants of all nations are to be made partakers of each other's joy or woe. Depressed by no sorrow, diverted by no evil, distracted by no discord, it is fed by the heavenly influence like a sacred fire on the altar of each heart. It is thus the proof of God's own presence in his own temple,

the vital Spirit quickening the body of Christ. And though it exist in the human mind, yet it is an attribute of Deity induced upon our fallen nature; for God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.

4. In respect to the means of enlarging the church, and increasing its spiritual usefulness, the will of God has been explicitly declared, on many points most important for the direction of his servants. “ For when Jesus ascended up on high he gave gifts unto men. And he gave some apostles, some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly framed together and compacted by that which every part supplieth, according to the effectual work-

ing in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”* From this and other passages of the same kind it is easy to learn that every thing of a worldly and compulsory kind is left out, and stands condemned by him, who declared in the time of his sorrow, that his kingdom is not of this world.

The great means of enlarging the church then, is the work of the ministry, which consists in speaking the truth in love; communicating the great peculiarities of gospel truth in so clear and convincing a manner as to make the men of this world see that their true interest and honour are involved in the performance of their spiritual duty. This, whether it relate to the honour of God, the acceptance of Christ, or the exaltation of the Holy Spirit, is called the work of God’s husbandry; the cultivation of true piety in the hearts of men. It constitutes, as before explained, one great department of duty devolving on each particular church. But the labour of a single church can only extend to a small sphere around the spot on which it meets. The untaught nations remain destitute, and many portions of those

* Eph. iv. 8—17.

countries already blessed with gospel light would still remain uninstructed unless a more extended operation, adapted to the condition of the world, had been employed.

It is this indeed, which the Lord intended, when he first commanded the apostles and brethren to go forth into *all the world*, and preach the gospel *to every creature*. The expressions were not understood at first, and when the apostles were made to understand that they were not to despise the Gentiles, they still manifested a desire to devote their attention to the culture of Jerusalem and Judea. But, God in his gracious providence, scattered them through the force of persecution; so that they went everywhere, preaching the word. He thus showed that the great object of their labour was not to exhaust their whole strength upon one place, but to give the whole world, if possible, an opportunity of embracing the truth. The race of man was regarded as being in a state of extreme danger, and they were required to explain to all the way which infinite mercy had provided, for their escape. Hence they were ambassadors for God, and as though God did beseech by them, they entreated a fallen world to be reconciled to God.

One great class of instruments employed in this work, was intended only for the special occasion. They were endowed with miraculous powers through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The object to be secured by this was twofold. First, the infallible declaration of divine truth, and the completion of sacred Scripture. Secondly, the attestation of divine truth, by the exhibitions of divine power. Thus, every one who professes to be inspired, must be asked for his divine credentials: for, as soon as the Scripture was perfect, and the number of saints, by whose holy lives and happy deaths the gospel had been reduced to experimental proof, were multiplied: then the power of working miracles ceased, and the inspiration of the Spirit was withheld.

It is not impossible for God to restore these gifts, nor is it said that he never will, but, until a sufficient proof has been given that he really has, the claim cannot be allowed. Nor can the examples of miraculous exertions, ever form a rule for those, to whom no miraculous power has been given. They must never rely upon it, nor must they profess it, unless they choose to incur the penalty of a daring presumption.

But, in the capacity in which they acted, without any regard to miraculous agency, there

they become guides to those that have to follow them. Here there are several points deserving particular notice.

First. A most extensive agency was employed by the churches in Judea and other countries, to diffuse the knowledge of Jesus through the dark parts of their own land. In aiding this work every individual seemed to take an interest, and every journey was made subservient to it. The deacons, the apostles, the pastors and private members, all took a part in it, according to the extent of their capabilities. It was a matter of soul stirring solicitude to the whole church. They desired it when in peace, but they wrought more effectually when they were persecuted. And, whilst it agreed with the words of the commission, and arose out of the appointments of providence, it was sustained by the constant gifts of mercy; and attended with immense success. It thus received every kind of divine approval, as a standing obligation on the churches.

Secondly. Special messengers were sent to labour amongst unconverted nations. These, for the most part, were men of the greatest piety and mental resources. They might not excel in every thing, but Paul, Barnabas, Peter, John, Luke, and others, so employed, were men of

eminence in their own department, and in that particular way which fitted them for their work. The reason for this appears in the fact that this work was the most arduous, most dangerous, and the most beset with temptation; a work, in which piety would be exposed to all kinds of hazard, at a time when no pious succour could be found to sustain the fainting spirit. Hence they were selected with great care, often by special direction of the Spirit: and set apart with great solemnity: their wants were supplied by the united exertions of the brethren, who all commended them to the grace of God. Thus, whilst the church was one, it maintained an aggressive apparatus that was constantly acting on the unconverted world. By this, the basest scenes of idolatry were visited and purged. The strongest fortress of infidelity was assaulted, and razed to the ground; and the most cruel, and ambitious city in the world was ultimately humbled at the foot of the cross, which had been raised by one of its meanest soldiers. From hence, it is clearly seen that the King in Zion did not mean to confine his operations to one spot until the work was complete, but to carry it on by many hands, and in many places, at the same

time; venturing all on the confident expectation of an universal triumph.

Thirdly. The enlargement and perfection of the church, was promoted by special visitations, or extended superintendence. The former is exemplified in the case of Paul and Barnabas,* in the case of Peter and John,† and in that of Barnabas.‡ By these the labours of other brethren were confirmed and perfected, and the converts guided in their combined exertions to cultivate and extend the Christian faith. Of the latter there are three special instances furnished in the sacred Scriptures, in Timothy, John, and Titus. Timothy was left by Paul at Ephesus, to watch over, organize, and direct, the churches in Lesser Asia. After he had been removed to other work, John was placed in the same station, and wrote for the use of those churches the gospel called by his name, the three epistles, and the apocalypse. Titus was entrusted with the churches in the Island of Crete. These had to watch over the whole, to supply defects in knowledge and practice, and direct the operations that might be originated for extending the kingdom of heaven there.

* Acts xv. 36.

† Acts viii. 14.

‡ Acts xi. 22.

This kind of brotherly superintendence has now failed, yet not altogether it prevails to a considerable extent amongst the Moravian brethren.* The iron dominion of episcopacy has rendered the idea frightful to the voluntary churches, but if any one will read carefully the epistles to Timothy and Titus, the epistles and Revelation of John, and especially the seven letters to the seven churches: he will see that the benefit lost by this deviation from apostolical practice, is not small; and that the obligation of returning to it is not to be despised.

From a review of all the transactions in the apostolical age, it will appear, that the great means employed was oral instruction, books were employed, but not to a great extent. By the foolishness of preaching, God had ordained to save them that believe. The great object, was to direct this preaching of the cross, so as to make it produce the greatest effect on the unconverted world. Hence their constant supplication of divine help, their dependence on divine direction, and the entire resignation of their hearts to the sacred spirit of God, whenever the intimations of his will were graciously afforded. But as the ministry was the great engine employed, it is desirable to inquire if

* See Bost's History of the Moravians.

any facts could be obtained to guide the preparations of such agency.

The first case to be examined, is that of Christ and his apostles. These men, so greatly exalted by the grace of God, have often been regarded in an erroneous light. They had special endowments, but these were given them for specific purposes: their inspiration rendered them infallible in completing the books of sacred Scripture; but this is no longer to be performed, and, therefore the inspiration is no longer needful. Their gifts of working miracles were given to justify their claim to divine inspiration, but these are no longer needed, because no one is now endowed with that high authority. The two great privileges of the first age have ceased to be given, because they have ceased to be useful. But these were not the principal means of procuring them success. If they had been idle, indifferent to the cases and necessities of the flock, and careless of their own devotion and virtue: all these endowments would have made them as useless as Balaam the son of Peor; and the abuse of them, would have drawn down upon their heads a judgement, as heavy as that which fell on Judas. Hence, in respect to themselves, they had to maintain the conflict of faith, and to keep under their bodies,

lest, after having preached to others, they themselves should become cast away. Their labours, like those of their successors, became successful only as they were blessed by the Holy Spirit; though they wrought miracles, and were inspired, they could not convert souls of themselves. God alone could give the increase. It is plain, therefore, that their labours were to be conducted by similar means, and were made dependent on the same Spirit; and required the same spirituality, and diligent constancy; which are now and always must be required in the ministers of Jesus Christ.

The question, therefore, is, whether this was given them by supernatural, or by ordinary means. The answer is, not by supernatural, but by ordinary means. The Saviour drew them round his person, in close, and familiar, intercourse. He taught them with the utmost diligence and simplicity. In his parables and conversations, all the great principles of moral truth are beautifully developed and applied to practical affairs. The doctrine of mercy was unfolded as far as they could understand and bear it, and the practice of teaching it explained. They had line on line, and precept upon precept. He placed before their eyes the mild magnificence of his own example. In

this they were made to see the practical exemplification of his own law ; applied as to the external duties of their station, and the motives that must govern their hearts. They were brought into his retirement : they joined in his conversations ; they witnessed his humility, tenderness, and constant diligence. He sent them out on special duties, and made them labour under his own eye. He became a servant for their sakes, and thus he taught them how to obey. By every means he stirred the energy within them. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings ; so the Lord himself did lead them, and train them for their mighty undertaking.

If this process had been purely supernatural, the effect would have been complete at once, like any other miracle. But this was not the case. They all advanced by degrees, and in some cases, but slowly. Their knowledge was not perfect, and their hearts were not made instantly pure. In Judas, the whole seems to have failed, for his love of money became his ruin. The imperfection of Peter was but too visible. The whole must be regarded as a lengthened course of moral training, which occupied nearly the whole three years of the

Saviour's ministry : and if there seem to be a completeness in his work, it is only the complete performance of this great engagement, in which he presents himself as a perfect example for the constant imitation of such as are thus employed.

The second authoritative example is supplied in the case of Titus. He was a Greek, and went up with Paul, when he attended the consultation at Jerusalem. It would not have appeared clearly what the object of this connexion was, if it were not for the epistle written to him when placed over the churches in Crete. From hence, however, it would seem to be obvious, that Paul took him to assist in the work under his own eye, that he might enter upon the sacred duty in a state of more perfect preparation. Thus he became the companion of his toil, the student of his doctrine, and the witness of his purity and perseverance. The time employed in his training and discipline is not known, but the epistle which was written when he entered on the station assigned for him in Crete, contains an immensely complete body of instruction, which still remains a treasure to the churches.

The third example is afforded in the case of Timothy. He had known the Scriptures from

his youth, and was still but young. It was discerned that God had endowed him with gifts adapted to the work, and Paul, therefore, would have him to go forth with him. His engagements may be traced with more fulness, but the narration is by no means complete. This, however, is known, that he was made the companion of his labour, the witness of his example, and the student of his doctrine. His engagements, under the direction of Paul, were numerous and important. At length, he is left at Ephesus, to reprove the teachers of false doctrine, and arrange the affairs in the churches that had been formed in different cities. It is then that one might see the kind of training to which he had been admitted. It resembled that which a father gives to his son more than any other. Every thing that enters at all into his health or usefulness, is touched with a most masterly hand, never was a discipline more complete and delicate. He pours over his "dear son in the fath," the warmest effusions of the most exalted love. The state of his health, the danger of his situation, and the completeness of his enjoyment, are all regarded with the utmost solicitude. The fervour of the exhortations, and the dignity of the spirit in which the epistles are written, have no parallel in the

pages of the most exalted poetry. They form a perfect directory for ministerial duties, standing altogether alone in the literature possessed by mankind.

The fourth case is that of Apollos and it is very clear. He was first converted to the doctrine of John the Baptist ; and taught it with great fluency. In this state he was found by Priscilla and Aquila. They, seeing his adaptation to useful labour, taught him the way of God more perfectly. He was then recommended to the brethren in Achaia ; and helped them much who through grace had believed. He was an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, and shared in the labour of Paul at Corinth. To him the expression refers, “ Paul may plant, and Apollos water, but God giveth the increase.”

In the application of these examples to present use, several particulars require to be observed.

For, in the first place, the language in which the sacred Scriptures are written, was then the language most used upon the face of the earth. The conquests of the Greeks, and the value of their books, had made it everywhere known. In this men conversed, and conducted most of their business and intercourse. The Old

Testament had been translated into Greek, and the New Testament was written in Greek, they read, and studied, and taught, therefore, in the same tongue. The books were written in the most popular style ; so that the work was as ready to their hands, as it would be for a teacher in this country, to read and explain the clearest history written and circulated in the English language.

Secondly. They lived very near to the time in which the events occurred. The Jewish nation was not yet dispersed, the form of their government still remained, the temple was yet standing, and the sacrifices offered there, constantly explained the Old Testament. The men who had to study and teach the gospel then, at that time, and under those circumstances, would understand every fact, and every figure of speech, the customs of the country which are so often referred to, were familiar to them; and many of the persons named in the sacred history were still alive. They stood, therefore, in a position which made their work as easy as it could possibly be to any one.

Thirdly. It has been often said, that the first teachers of Christianity were illiterate men. So they were at first. But the discipline they received from their Lord, and the diligence

with which they laboured, made them peculiarly wise in the work of the Lord. They understood the doctrines of religion, the principles of virtue, and the way of mercy most perfectly. It is wonderful when reading in the original language the epistles and writings of those who were the least instructed, to see the perfect accuracy with which they describe, the duties to be performed, the hopes to be cherished, the sins to be forsaken, and the motives by which the saints must be actuated in seeking the kingdom of heaven. They seemed to know how to persuade better than any men that ever lived. They could find the place of tears, of hope, of fear and shame, and seemed to possess every avenue to the heart of man. They used the greatest plainness of speech, but they never mistake in describing the thing they intend to teach and enforce. But some were more eminent than the rest. Luke was more elegant in his writing, but perfectly accurate. Paul was a mighty man both as a scholar and a saint. He had studied all the depths of learning in the Hebrew school, and seemed as though he had imbibed the very spirit of Moses and the prophets. He was so learned in all the books of the Grecian school, that he quotes them with the greatest ease and elegance. It

is not possible to find a single error in all his writings, either in the statement of duty, or the exposure of falsehood, or in painting the feelings of the mind. He uses the very words which the best authors in his day would have used, and which they did use, to describe the exercises and virtues of the heart. All human nature seemed to be laid out before him like one vast scene exposed in the clearest light of day. The intricate philosophy of Asia, and the cold infidelity of Athens, were alike unable to stand before his mighty reasoning. His exposure of sin made the wicked tremble, though they were seated on a throne; and his exhibitions of heavenly glory stirred up the courage of the saint even in the furnace of affliction. In the church and in the world he was the greatest man that ever formed the air of heaven into sound articulate; excepting only the person of his Lord. Besides this, the apostle John has shown in the 1st chapter of his gospel a perfect knowledge of the learning that then, and for many ages, prevailed in Asia, so that the apostles cannot be properly called illiterate. They were most deeply learned in all that relates to religion and God.

Fourthly. It is very plain that none of these advantages are naturally possessed by Chris-

ians in this country now. They have to study the sacred Scriptures through the medium of translations. These, though they deserve great confidence, can never give the spirit and force of the original. They teach us much of divine truth, and none who read them attentively, and obey them honestly, will ever lose their reward. But they have been so translated, as to give support to systems which men have not been able to justify by a simple appeal to divine authority. Besides, the distance of time, and place, and the entire destruction of all that state of society which then prevailed, have rendered it difficult to trace the beauty of those allusions which are made by the sacred writers to things that existed when they wrote. The knowledge of those books, and systems of learning, which Paul and the other apostles studied, is not to be possessed by men now, nor have the churches any inspired interpreters by whom these deficiencies may be supplied. God has given to the nations his word, and he is pleased now, having shown its value by the experience of so many ages, to exercise the diligence and faithfulness of his servants, both in studying, and practising, the truth which it contains.

Fifthly. From hence may be seen the duty to be observed in preparing the men who may be called by God to discharge the Christian ministry. Their education should not be worldly, but spiritual. They must be placed as nearly as possible in the same situation, with respect to the people which they have to teach, as that in which the first teachers were placed, in respect to the people they taught. The disadvantage of the time in which they live must be done away by the study of history, so that they may understand the things as they were when the Saviour lived, and the apostles laboured. The disadvantage of speaking another language must be surmounted, by studying carefully the languages in which the Scriptures were written. They ought also to read the books which the apostles quoted, and those which were written and studied in their day. Their knowledge in these things, should be intimate and profound, so that they might, with ease to themselves, and with comfort to their hearers, state the facts which lighten up the sacred page, and make its beautiful solemnity manifest. Besides this, they should be trained in all the practical duties of their office. They must be taught how to divide the word of truth rightly; to administer a word in season

to him that is weary. The government of the churches should be fully explained to them; and the best means of instructing the young, the ignorant, and those that are out of the way. As physicians teach their pupils how to treat the diseased bodies of men, so these should be taught how to deal with the diseased souls of men. The precious balm of Gilead is the medicine they have to administer, and they must be taught its healing virtues, and how to administer it with the greatest advantage. The school of these prophets, should be the place of deep devotion, where their hearts may be often filled with the purifying influence of God's own Spirit. Every effort must be employed to make the period of their retirement from the world supply them with the same discipline and benefits which Jesus gave to his apostles in the cities of Judea, and the plains of Galilee.

CHAP. VIII.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS.

Eternal thanks are due to the Father of infinite mercy, for having sent his holy word, and for bountifully pouring out his Holy Spirit, to raise up within these realms, multitudes of Christian churches, so nearly resembling in character and constitution, the churches of ancient days. May He who never sleeps watch over them for ever. Amongst them, also, he has raised most graciously, the growing spirit of a merciful adventure in mighty undertaking, for the Saviour's glory. It would be difficult to name them all. Some regard the rising youth, and lead their thoughts to piety; some embrace the ignorant at home, and point them to the Saviour; others extend their lovely energies abroad, and tell the heathen they have hope. Now, the sick and indigent are comforted. Whilst higher efforts train the gifted youth for ministerial exertions. Now, at length God has thought on Zion in his mercy. Wakened from her slumber, she even now shakes off the dust of long polluted ages; and

putting on the garments of her beauty, she smiles upon the wilderness, and makes it glad.

Still, let not the sons of Zion be afraid to look upon the imperfection of their work. That which God has wrought in them is proof that he will help them to complete his will. The following queries, therefore, are with humble deference submitted to their careful contemplation.

But, before they are stated, it will be right to consider the position in which the Christian churches of England stand; and the steps by which they have been brought into it.

In 1374, Wickliffe was sent to Rome, to complain against the papal policy, in conferring the benefices in the English church on foreigners. By this means the nobles were oppressed, and the provisions furnished by the church for their younger sons were diverted from their use, to bribe the agents of the papal government. The complaint of the reformer being disregarded in Rome, he appealed to the word of God, and translated it into his native language. For this he must have died, had not the nobles felt that their interests were at stake, and that this law afforded them the best protection. It would have been happy for England, and the world, if they had yielded

implicit obedience to the precepts of their Maker ; but, they found that his decree was as much opposed to the injuries they inflicted, as it was to those which they endured : and therefore, after a few concessions from Rome, the bones of Wickliffe were resigned to insult. by the families in which his life had been preserved.

After the long reign of Henry VII. the nobles were reduced. The whole policy of Rome was then concentrated on the throne. The ambition of Wolsey, and the divorce of Katherine, determined the crisis. The law of God was again adopted as a shield for the royal purpose. To this the king adhered until the nation was delivered from the power of Rome, and the power of the throne was established : but, when his second queen was to be murdered, and he wished, in addition, to oppress the puritans, then Henry VIII. a stickler for law, forsook the law of God.

When the tragic scenes of Mary's martyrdoms had closed in the accession of Elizabeth to the throne ; she, like a good monarch, appealed to the law of God in behalf of the protestants : but she boldly rejected that law when the puritans were oppressed, with fines, impri-

sonment, with piercing sarcasm, and with banishment beyond the seas.

The puritans appealed to the law of God against the perfidy and the oppression of Charles I. and God sent them deliverance : but, they broke the law of God by injustice to each other, and he overturned their government.

The oppressive policy of the second James, produced a national appeal to divine law, in the revolution of 1688 : but that law was violated, by perpetuating to others the injustice against which the nation had complained.

Since that time the recognised establishment has appealed to the law of God for protection against popery, and other evils ; whilst its advocates have broken that very law by the misery inflicted on dissenters.

The dissenters appeal to the law of God for protection against national impositions, it is desired that they might carry the law which protects them through all their institutions. Here wisdom is defined by infinite perfection. It is the privilege of the church to be blessed in all its parts with a daily approximation to perfect obedience. Here their interest, and duty, combine. As in all, the imperfection of our

fallen nature will be seen ; so, in every case, we may expect to find partial appeals to divine law, combined with instances of its neglect or violation. The wide, and abundant diffusion of God's word, is, in this respect, a blessing to all ; the benefit of which may be seen in the changes which daily transpire in every religious society. It is not to condemn any, therefore, but merely to facilitate the approximation of all parties to a state of perfect obedience to divine law, that these queries are subjoined.

First. *Would not great advantage accrue to religion in general, if the unity of the church were more constantly and more prominently recognized?* The sweetness of this, has been tasted already in a good degree, and forms one of the richest effects of general activity in the cause of Christ. But still there is much to be gained. The denominational feeling, necessary to individualize the exertions of particular bodies, has been combined with too much worldly policy ; and it has assumed too exclusive and forbidding a character. The struggle for religious liberty on the one side, and the over-estimation of importance and power on the other, have combined to make the churchman and dissenter feel more like antagonists on the battle - plain, than members of the

body of Christ. Hence, a thousand childish artifices are adopted, either to hide the fact, or shift the blame of their contention. Why could not the great, and good men, so numerous, on either side, pause for a moment, and consider that the cause for which they live, and labour, is but one ?

In seeking this object, a principal point of attention is the rule by which the extent of Christian association should be regulated. This will not only appear from the passages relating to the subject, but also from the terms of the proposition itself. In becoming Christians, men do not cease to be human beings. Nor do they go out of the world; consequently, they are not by that circumstance separated from any part of human society, nor from any part of human affairs. What the law of God allows other men to do, it allows them as men to do with them; to eat, to drink, to labour, or to negotiate. But in all those things which are Christian, and in which this distinctive character is exhibited before the world, the term of their fellowship includes both the fact, and the sincerity of the Christian profession. This is the demand which a Christian must make, both for the sake of admonishing bad men, and also for the honour of God. If Paul

believe, after a careful and a charitable judgement in the case, that Peter be a Christian ; though he be weak, and mistaken in many things, Paul is bound to admit his Christian fellowship, to own, and act with him, as a member of Christ, to seek his good, and to rejoice over him, as over one that was delivered from death. But, if Paul in his conscience, believe that Peter is not a Christian, and that his condition is not safe for eternity ; whether his defect appear in the articles of his belief, or in the points of his practice, he is compelled by the law of God, to refuse all Christian fellowship whatever. The same law prevails in the case of separate congregations, and larger bodies of converted men. One great object is common to them all. They have to break the delusion of unconverted men, and to glorify the Saviour, who died for their redemption. No policy, founded on the solecism of “a church within a church,” can ever lead them to neglect this soul-uniting principle without committing sin. Hence, in the reprehension of Simon’s mercenary spirit it was said, “thou hast no part, nor lot in the matter.” The Christians of Corinth were commanded “not to keep company with fornicators.” The elect lady, is by the apostle John,

commanded not receive into her house, or to bid God speed to those who dishonoured the person of our Lord. Acts viii. 18—25. I Cor. v. 9—13. II John 9—11. James ii. 1—5. Jude 5—13.

If, on either side, bad men creep in, as they did in the days of the apostles, to spy out the liberty of the church, and to disturb its peace; let them be pitied by all, and be by all rejected, as they were in former days. The triumph of the church is to be secured by the prevalence of faith, and spiritual piety, reverence in worship, and universal obedience to the law of God; and nothing can advance the former, which leads to a diminution of the latter. The men of this world must be converted to God or lost; let every part of the church labour to gain this object, as though they were inspired with the same spirit of love, and meekness, and faith. The freedom of the church is decreed in heaven, and must be obtained on earth: for God hath sworn that every knee shall bow to him, confessing his authority. But this is not the concern of one, but of all, and every part, of the Christian church, however great or insignificant. Nor merely so, perfect religious liberty, is a human right; and every human being has an interest in its acqui-

sition. This ought to combine the individuals of the race, whenever their consultation or exertion were needed: not separate in hot and discordant conflict, brethren beloved for Christ's sake.

Secondly. *Would not many benefits accrue to the church, if a more united consultation on matters of general business could but be obtained?* It is not known, that in the apostle's days, the messengers of mercy ever run foul of each other in their work. If one went to the Jews, another devoted himself to the Gentiles. The world was so wide, and presented so much more labour than they all could perform, that they felt it sinful and childish, to waste their time and strength in mutual competition. Every thing was done in the shortest way they could devise. The arrangement for collections, was made so as to prevent any interference with more spiritual duties. This happy concurrence of different exertions, is now in danger of being lost. The claims and emulation of different societies, become great and urgent on every hand: and great care has become needful to prevent this, which is a real blessing, from leading to ill effects. The want of co-operation, has already raised the expense of apparatus far beyond what any man can justify. In one

society, whose annual income is not much more than £12,000 a year, £1000 a year was for some time paid in salary to persons employed in collecting, and holding publick meetings; besides the other expenses, of travelling, postage, and all the other incidental disbursements, both of the society, and also of its agents. In some, the expenses of this kind, are studiously concealed; as though this would alter the case for the better. This leads to other results, than the mere waste of public money. The societies that have paid agents, will occupy the ground, and intercept those who have less agency at work, and proceed with greater economy. Hence, the smaller societies, are obliged to run to an expense far beyond anything that their income will justify; before they can obtain any assistance in prosecuting the objects to which they are devoted. If a correct account of all the fruitless journies, vexatious failures, expenses of travelling, and other ill effects which follow in the train, were made and presented to the publick every year, or merely for one year: it would make all the churches feel at once that something should be done to alter it. These facts are not introduced for the sake of attaching blame to any one; all the blame that can be attached to any one case at present

referred to, is a jealous dread of mutual consultation. This is a fault. It is contrary to Scripture example. And it is neglecting the means by which all the evil could be cured. The bodies are already organized, by which the whole work may be done. The matter belongs to each of those denominations of Christians, who severally unite in diffusing their own views of divine law and mercy. Many of these have their unions or conference already prepared. Each church may send its own pastor, or each association of churches, in each denomination throughout the kingdom, might be allowed to send one or two representatives to the meeting of the union or conference of the body. There, amongst other matters, it might be considered, what societies should be sanctioned and supported by the whole body. This single step would protect society from many disgraceful impositions to which it has hitherto been exposed. When this was done, each denomination would be found to have its Home mission, its Foreign mission, its Irish society, its Colleges and Societies for the relief of the poor, &c. The object then would be, to arrange for the support of all these, whatever they might be, with the least possible expense of time, strength, and money. The country might be

divided into districts, including cities or associations that might lie adjacent to each other ; and thus form a direct line of churches through every different part of the country. All the missionary operations, which belong to any one class of Christians, would thus be brought into concert. If the brethren choose to send separate deputations for each society through the districts, the time and the persons might be appointed for each ; so that whilst the agents of one society, were collecting in the east ; those of another might pass through the west ; a third might reap the harvest of the south ; and a fourth, glean up the bounty of the north, without interfering in any way with each other. Each society would then submit its own claims to each church, and receive what was pleasant in return, without any painful disappointment, and without wasting either money or time, in useless travelling. By this means, thousands of pounds would be annually gained to the service of religion ; and thousands would be saved to the religious publick.

The work, however, will admit of being still more simplified. If each church would form one auxiliary, embracing the interests of each missionary society in its own denomination ; then, one deputation for each district, would be

sufficient in a year, and one missionary meeting would be sufficient for each auxiliary. The time would be known, and every means employed to render it efficient. The church or committee chosen by the auxiliary would vote the proceeds to each society, as they might feel disposed, and receive in return, heralds and information from the whole : or each collector could enter the sum subscribed for each society, whether the home mission, the foreign mission, or any other. The amounts would then be remitted exactly, according to the wish of each subscriber.

The great fear, in this case, has been, lest by uniting the claims of three societies in the appeals of one auxiliary, a smaller amount should be obtained than otherwise, through the application of three. This will scarcely be proved without an experiment ; and where the experiment has been tried, the result has not been so. If, however, a little less were gathered, a great deal less would be wasted ; and more would be devoted to the great object.

Thirdly. Could not something be done at such conventions *to facilitate the erection of places for worship ; the relief of poor ministers unfit for labour through age or affliction ; and the widows and orphans left destitute by*

ministers who have entered their rest? For the first of these objects, the precedents of the New Testament afford us no decisive guidance. The places of prayer and synagogues of the Jews were numerous through almost all the cities, and where this was not the case, the zeal of the first age would soon supply the deficiency. Oppressed by no compulsory system, they had little to impede the attainment of their object. Voluntary benevolence seems to have readily supplied whatever was required. But the Christian churches in this land are placed in a vastly different situation, If two or three hundred Christians desire a house in which to meet and worship God, they are compelled to build it out of the small remainder of their income, which is rescued from taxation and compulsory exactions. Hence the need of assistance in many cases of distressing perplexity. But, the urgency of the claim, and the kindness with which it is received and met, have caused an immense amount of imposition and imprudence. In many instances, the chapel cases have overturned ministerial character and usefulness, disturbed the peace of churches, betrayed the confidence of individuals, and dragged into the church a train of the worst evils which result from infidelity. In order to ac-

comply with the object, and to prevent the concomitant evils, why could not the annual meeting of each united body, choose a committee of building funds for itself? To this, every church should send its case, whenever help became needful; where the deeds could be examined, and the respective merits of the whole investigated. To this each church in the denomination should send an annual collection, and each pastor might have the privilege of nominating the particular case to which the amount of subscriptions raised by his church during that year should be granted, together with as much as the committee might be able to add from the general proceeds of the fund. By this means, more money might be raised, less would be wasted, and many most afflictive evils would be avoided, the churches would dispose with perfect independence of all that they raised individually, and all the movement of the several bodies of Christians, would be characterized with more healthy indications of spirituality and vigour.

The foregoing plan appears to combine the advantage of unity with those which attend the exercise of personal and direct appropriation. To others it has appeared that the object would be more effectively attained by the institution

of local building funds connected with each association, and holding correspondence with each other. The following scheme would effect that object.

1. Each association might appoint a committee of its own members, to examine and relieve cases of debt, incurred by building places of worship.

2. The ministers in the association might then resolve not to sign any case for individual application.

3. Each church should make a collection for the building fund every year, and the treasurer and secretaries of the fund should make it their business to obtain subscribers to it through all the churches in the association.

4. The funds thus raised should be applied by the committee according to the merits of the cases brought before them.

5. The officers of each fund should make themselves acquainted with the nature of a deed, so as to be able to detect any gross error, but some one source should be fixed upon, from whence the best advice could be obtained in matters of difficulty, and where the safety of all deeds should be attested.

6. When the deed has been attested, and the case relieved by the association in which it is

comprised, if further relief be necessary, the officers of the building fund, which relieved it last, might recommend it to the officers of other building funds, inserting the amount of their own grant, together with their own recommendation in the case book. Thus, it might pass from place to place, until its wants had been supplied.

The support of the poor and superannuated ministers, together with the widows and orphans left destitute, is a matter of more clear and direct obligation. The poor are always to be regarded, but if so, those surely ought not to be forgotten who have become so through the service of the churches. At present there are several laudable efforts made for affording partial assistance and relief. But their limited character renders them inefficient. One good insurance office in each body of Christians, formed for this purpose, in which the rate of insurance could be reduced by the voluntary contributions of the wealthy, might give effective relief to every superannuated minister of good reputation in the church of Christ, with all the widows and orphans that providence might at any time cast into the bosom of Christian benevolence.

Fourthly. By annual and mutual consultation *might not more effective means be used to furnish the churches with an efficient ministry.* At present it often happens that the gifts bestowed on the churches are lost without ever being seen or known. At other times they are nearly lost for want of being properly cultivated. The ministerial agency existing at any one period is not used to the greatest advantage because not used in concert. Stations are lost for want of exertion, whilst exertions, are wasted on places that bring no return for cultivation. The colleges have to struggle through their work, leaning on a few individuals, and sometimes obtaining a very precarious support; whilst claims for the best results of education are multiplying every hour. Let but the members and pastors of each body of Christians meet at their own convenience. Let them feel that they are one, let them consult, as the saints of old consulted, let them but obey and feel that they are one as God commands them, and all these affairs will fall into the order of nature and duty; the publick business of each department of the church will then be a mild, a silent, but an invigorating process, like the circulation of blood through the members of an healthy constitution.

Let not the churches fear that such an arrangement will destroy their liberty. Every limb will still remain as free when restored to its proper place, and to an healthy condition, as ever it can be, when dislocated, and inflamed. The societies, whether they relate to foreign or to home affairs, will still remain as free as when in a state of separation. The committees, &c. may be chosen at their own publick meetings, as before; their trust would remain the same; only the plans for obtaining the pecuniary support would be formed in concert, so that one might not clash in its movements with the others. In just the same way would the churches be as voluntary as before, nothing could compel them to admit a missionary deputation unless they pleased, and when they had formed their auxiliary in any town in favour of the two or three societies that might be recommended to the general support of the body, still each church would have to divide its own subscriptions; and appoint the amount of remittance to be made to each society.

There are some efforts in which it behoves the members of all denominations to join. The extirpation of some particular vice, as that of intemperance, which now becomes the means

of polluting so many thousands, and of ruining so many families, is not the solicitude of one body of Christians, it is a great common cause, in which all are bound to unite, whenever union promises the hope of advantage. The diffusion of sacred Scripture, and the distribution of religious tracts, are parts of the common cause to be embraced and supported by all. In this country the liberation of the church from earthly policies and violence; is a great and common solicitude. Others of the same kind will often occur, and the law of God requires; that, whenever they do occur; every Christian, every minister, every church, every society, and every denomination, however high, or however insignificant, in respect to this world's affairs, should join to promote the common object. Each integral part of the spiritual body, has a right to claim from every other part, a due regard to the prosperity and triumph of the whole; and each part, however small, is bound to use its utmost efforts in promoting it.

One great, and most important object in these days, is to give an effective character to the different local associations. They stand nearly in the same relation to the several counties, which the churches addressed in the apos-

tolical epistles bore to the countries in which they were situated. Hence the practical precepts given at the close of the epistles, may be studied with great advantage, as forming a directory for their guidance. The epistles to Timothy and Titus are in this respect very valuable, for each of these individuals were entrusted with that kind of superintendence which is now held by the whole association. The utmost fraternal co-operation must be cultivated in securing the spiritual prosperity of the whole district. Each church that stands in association should be regarded with Christian sympathy and love. They should be the organs of conducting all the efforts made to evangelize the destitute parts of the district, and for this purpose each association should stand in immediate connexion and correspondence with the Home Missionary Society: guiding and supporting its local operations. For the sake of advancing this object, each association should be anxious to draw out and use to the utmost advantage whatever spiritual gifts the Lord might be pleased to impart unto the churches. On these too must devolve the labour of bringing the arrangements of the several counties and districts into the general arrangement for the collection of missionary resources. In a word,

they must labour in all things to raise the cause of the blessed Redeemer to a state of benevolent independence and efficiency, in the several spheres they occupy.

CHAP. IX.

SUGGESTIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES.

AFTER all that has been said, the great difficulty lies with individual churches. The general arrangements are but few, and would, by friendly consultation, soon be reduced to perfect simplicity.

The business of each church is more complex ; because every publick society brings its claim, in addition to the several solitudes of home. A voluntary Christian church has thus come to be a little cluster of benevolent societies, more or less closely united with each other ; but all deriving their nourishment from the same branch of the spiritual vine. They thus form a most luxuriant display of rich and distinguishing mercy. Let it never be forgot-

ten, that all the difficulty of directing those churches, proceeds from the imbecility of fallen nature, in receiving, and improving, the mighty bestowments of divine grace. This must always be difficult, because the results of divine compassion are infinitely beyond the comprehension of a finite mind. Still, every painful difficulty may soon be conquered by a careful regard to frankness, and order in the management of business.

Let the case be supposed of a church supporting the following objects:—

1. Its Pastor. 2. Its incidental expenses. 3. The alms of the church. 4. The Sabbath school. 5. Bible classes. 6. A Tract Society. 7. An auxiliary Missionary Society in aid of the Foreign Mission, Home Mission, Irish Society, and Fund for Relief of Poor Churches. It may be asked how all these objects can be conducted without discord or embarrassment?

The first three are essential to the constitution of the church, and hence they have been committed to particular officers. The deacons are chosen to serve the church in the superintendence of these pecuniary affairs. These then are the first objects of solicitude, and must be secured. The minister must have his bread provided for him; and it should be carried

to him punctually, and delicately, so as not to offend his feelings ; but rather to convince him, that whether the amount be more, or less, than his necessities required, it was the free and grateful bestowment, of all that an affectionate church could raise. The incidental expenses must also be met, and paid : few meetings can be held without them, and the churches are commanded to owe no man anything but love. The poor must also be regarded with compassion ; and, where the collections at the ordinance are not sufficient, further efforts must be made at once. One of these objects should be committed to one deacon ; another, to another, that no one become overburdened. Each should have his book provided by the church ruled like those in the appendix, 1, 2, and 3. These books should be balanced every quarter, and examined by all the deacons together ; who should meet once at least within every three months for their own special duties. What they can raise for the minister should then be conveyed to him kindly and with tenderness. If the subscription for incidentals fail, it should be made known at once ; and more money raised, or less spent. If the collection for the poor fail, this also should be known at once, and the store of charity replenished. The great diffi-

culty here is caused by suffering the church to go in debt. This should never be allowed. If the church cannot pay £1, when due to the deacons, how will they be paid when the debt has accumulated to £50 or £100.

When these three objects have been provided for, the next thing is, to provide the ways and means for the other societies. Each object should be committed to four or five brethren who will volunteer to labour in one or other of the departments. The greatest care should be taken, not to deposit more than one object in the hands of one committee; for then, some will be burdened and others idle. Every body in the church should have something to do for God, and especially the young. Those who feel unable to do anything, must be taught, and guided, and even led; until they can go alone. Then, in order that the whole church may feel an interest in all the objects; the church meetings in December, March, June, and September, should be made quarterly, at which each committee should present its report. It need not be long, but merely include the points of real business, clearly and concisely stated with any particular case of usefulness that may have occurred to encourage the brethren in their work of love and mercy. The

abstract of these reports should be entered in the minute book, and regularly numbered ; like the specimen given in the appendix No. 4. The church meeting in December, or, that quarterly meeting which immediately precedes the annual meeting of the association to which the church belongs, should be made the annual church meeting. All the reports should then be made up for the whole year. The number of members admitted, dismissed, excluded, restored or deceased, should be entered on the minutes, and the registry of the church made up by one of the deacons, auditors should be appointed to examine all the accounts of the society for the next year, and the report of the auditors for the past year read to the church ; and finally, the letter, and report for the association should be read and adopted. Thus, the whole of the business would be brought before the members. The meetings of the church would be filled with interest ; and the pastor would be enabled to render the proper assistance, advice, and encouragement, to all. The best method of supporting these societies is that of private subscription. But nothing should prevent the annual delivery of publick pastoral discourses, addressed to each. In order to arrange these conveniently, each church should first

learn when the annual meetings of the Missionary Society will be held in the district; and let that be fixed first, that the help of the deputation may be secured at the publick meeting and sermons for that object. When this has been done, the sermons addressed to the Sabbath school, the Tract visiters, and the Bible classes, should be so arranged as to have one between each quarterly collection. If they can be supported by private subscription, it will make the publick services so much the more spiritual and pleasant; if not, the collections will thus be attended with the least possible inconvenience. And if at any time an additional object of Christian exertion be presented to the church, the pastor and deacons must consider faithfully whether they are able to admit it; and when it can be admitted without deranging the order of services appointed for the year.

In the proper management of a Christian church, there is still another object to be kept in view; namely, the visitation of its members. This will be done principally by the pastor and deacons. But, when the church is large, the duties of their office become so great, that they require considerable assistance. This may be afforded by means of visiters appointed at the church meeting. Several districts should

be formed in which the members live at convenient distances, to be visited in a short time. These should be numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, &c. Visitors should then be appointed to each, and entered in the minute book, as in No. 4, in the appendix. These visitors should see and converse with their brethren, point out to the pastor when any case of affliction or sorrow needs his particular attention ; make arrangements for a private prayer meeting ; or meetings for pastoral conversation. The reports of the visitors should be called for until they are brought in ; and, at proper intervals, others should be appointed ; sending them two, and two, as Jesus, did his disciples.

In this work, the most experienced members should be joined with those who have recently entered the church ; that the one may help the other, and lead them gently by the hand into scenes of active duty. In this way, the whole of the members should be visited at least twice in the year, not even one should ever be neglected. The churches will thus be brought into the sweetness of Christian fellowship. Inquirers will be discovered, and encouraged ; souls will be brought under the sound of mercy, which would otherwise have been lost sight of ; and God will be greatly glorified.

Some individuals, to whom the principles of business are novel, may think the order of discipline now proposed too laborious for conducting a Christian church. This is quite a mistake. When once a society has agreed with frankness and Christian love to adopt it; the whole may be put in motion at two or three meetings. The pastor, and deacons, should be requested to form the arrangements in private: and they will be bound in honour to come to a mutual agreement in what they lay before the church, so that no difference exist between them at the church-meeting. The books would cost but a few shillings each, and they should be purchased, bound, and ruled, ready for the several objects to which they are to be devoted. The arrangement should then follow for the annual services of the several societies, and a plan for the whole year be hung up in the vestry. Finally, the system of visitation should receive the earliest possible attention, because this is to bring forth the mutual expression of Christian love and joy. It is only on paper that the plan seems to be complex, in practice it is perfectly simple and easy. It reduces the pain and labour of conducting a church beyond all calculation. It brings all to the work that are able to do

anything. A church, when once brought into this course of discipline, will be perfectly astonished to find the amount of useful labour it can perform in a little time. When the business proceeded without any record of the church's resolutions, half the affairs were forgotten, or neglected. One looked to one, and another to another, until no one felt himself responsible. The deacons became overdrawn beyond what they could afford, and overburdened with the detail of church business. If a crafty, selfish, or ignorant man, happened to get into office ; the whole was shuffled to gratify his wish : until the brethren were grieved, the church divided, the congregation scattered, the cause of religion rendered odious, and the minister deprived of his daily bread. But now a place and a time are appointed for every thing, and every thing kept in its place. No time is wasted, no labour is lost. Every thing that God is pleased to give, tells upon the great object ; and, if the funds of the church are too small, it gains that kind of character which gives the most free access to the help and resources of others.

If, however, instead of diminishing the labour, care, and perplexity of church affairs, the plan had really increased their solicitude ;

still, as the whole business consists in obeying the laws of God, and in teaching other immortal spirits to seek their eternal happiness in the same way: it remains a matter for calm reflection, whether the brethren are at liberty to adopt so careless a method as is found in some of the churches. The members are not registered, or known; the cash accounts never balanced; the minutes never recorded; the brethren seldom visited; and, if the children of the poor are taught, the important work is committed to a few of the most inexperienced, and undecided in the whole congregation. If such carelessness were adopted in any man's worldly business, it must go to ruin presently: and how can it be right in matters so solemn, as those connected with the church of Christ; where God is to be glorified, and souls saved.

It is pleasing to see that on every hand, God has raised up in the church a soul-stirring solicitude for whatever can give effect and glory to the kingdom of heaven. It is to this feeling, and to those who cherish it, that these hints are, with most affectionate simplicity, addressed. Let those brethren, beloved in the Lord, seek to guide all their efforts by the sincere word of inspired truth. Here, let them seek diligently, constantly, and prayerfully, for every

manifestation of the will of God. This, in every case, is law. To this they must adhere, as to the most wise, and authoritative rule of human conduct. In so doing they will not only secure the best blessings for themselves, but they will also exhibit to every part of the intelligent creation, the mercy, and tenderness of their Father's government.

But, there is one consideration, which should urge sincere Christians of every name, to labour diligently for the nearest possible approximation to apostolical simplicity in the church of Christ. It regards the character and power of its enemies. They have long laid aside the old policy, of crushing the church by persecution. The motto now is, either corrupt and subjugate; or else, divide and scatter. These two methods, have so fearfully prevailed, that there is not a Christian country upon earth, which has not now to struggle under some corrupted form of Christianity. This is a great dishonour to the cross: and a principal impediment to the progress of true piety. Only let the church put on her beautiful garments, and stand forth in the simple perfection with which the Saviour has adorned her, and the charm of her beauty shall no longer be resistible. The gospel of Jesus, is still the power of God unto

salvation ; and ever shall be whilst the world remains ; it only needs to be exhibited in the simplicity of its own ordinances, and to be animated with its own spirit of heavenly beneficence and mercy.

And how can the brethren forget, the advantage of their country, and the times in which they are permitted to live ? Had they been born a few leagues distant on the surface of the globe, or a few years earlier in the course of time, all the energy of human nature would have been wasted in vain, in a design which may now be effected with facility and pleasure. The fathers have gone before, they have, by their labour, tears, supplications, and sufferings, prepared the way for their children : thus the field of Christian labour in this happy land, blooms in the very springtime beauty ; the fruit already ripens to a state which promises an abundant recompense for the miseries and martyrdoms of by-gone days. Let fellow Christians only cultivate a grateful recollection of their mercies, and every point in their extending prospect shall be irradiated with the brightest beams of hope. The moral machinery now committed to their use, and moved by their exertions, if carefully preserved from the dirt, and derangements, of earthly policy ;

will produce an effect upon the nations, unparalleled in the history of mankind.

It is not presumed that these hints will complete the return to apostolical simplicity, which is so much to be desired; but, if Christian ministers and churches can be once united in the effort, they will find themselves invested with a power, which, though not Omnipotent, shall conquer every opposition to their object.

May He, who, sitting in the heavens, smiles on every good intention for his glory; make this, and every other labour of his servants, promote the final majesty of his dominion.

Amen.

APPENDIX.

No. I.

Book for Subscriptions for the Ministry.

Names.	March.		June.		September.		December.		Total for 1834.	
	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.
T. T—,	1	0 0	1	0 0	1	0 0	1	0 0	4	0 0
G. H—,	1	10 0	1	10 0	1	0 0	1	0 0	5	0 0
M. D—,	2	0 0	2	0 0	2	0 0	2	0 0	8	0 0
C. S—,	0	15 0	0	15 0	0	15 0	0	15 0	3	0 0
T. D—,	0	10 0	0	10 0	0	10 0	0	10 0	2	0 0
Seat Rents,	10	0 0	11	0 0	11	0 0	11	10 0	43	10 0
Baptist Fund,							5	10 0	5	10 0

£71 0 0

No. II.
Subscriptions for *Incidental Expenses*.

Names.	March.		June.		September.		December.		Total for 1834.	
	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.	£	s. d.
T. T—,	0	5 0	0	5 0	0	0 0	0	5 0	0	15 0
G. H—,	1	0 0	0	0 0	0	0 0	0	0 0	1	0 0
C. S—,	0	3 0	0	3 0	0	3 0	0	3 0	0	12 0
Quarterly collections, .	3	10 0	2	15 0	2	10 0	4	0 0	12	15 0
Total for 1834,									15	2 0
Disbursement,									15	12 0
Collected at Annual Church Meeting,									0	10 0
									Balance, £ 0 0 0	

Subscriptions for the Poor.

		£	s.	d.
1834.		1	16	3
March 2,	Collection at Ordinance,			
— 27,	T. H. Donation,	1	0	0
April 4,	Collection at Ordinance,	2	5	6
— 22,	Dividend or Rent,	5	0	0
May 4,	Collection at Ordinance,	1	17	4
— 29,	C. S—, Donation,	2	0	0
June 1,	Collection at Ordinance,	3	0	0
	Total	£ 16	19	1

This is a common day book entry, and may be the best for the Sabbath School, the Tract Society, or any other object for which the entries will be various, but not often repeated; but where there are many annual or quarterly subscribers, the former plan is most convenient, because it brings the whole before the eye at once, and saves the trouble of frequently writing the same names.

Specimen of Minute Book, with its Entries.

Church Meeting, September 24, 1834.

Present—Brethren Tomkins, March, Thomas, Giles, Dando, Ellard, Watson, Dorkin, &c. &c.

The Pastor Presiding.

201. Minutes of the last Meeting read and confirmed.

202. The Pastor having reported that James Nailor wished to be united to the Church, Resolved, that Brethren Thomas and Giles be requested to visit him.

203. Resolved, on the Report of Messengers to John Jarman, that his experience be laid before the Church. (Min. 196.)

204. Resolved, on hearing the experience and profession of John Jarman, that he be admitted to the Church.

205. The Pastor reporting that the Members had been arranged into Eight Districts, according to their Residence, Resolved, that the following Brethren be requested to visit them :—

No. 1. Brethren Dando and Ellard.

No. 2. Brethren Watson and Dorkin.

No. 3. Brethren Johnson and Freeman.

&c. &c. &c.

206. The Pastor reported that the Sacrament of Baptism was administered on Lord's Day, Aug. 28, 1834.
 To Jane Seymour, (Min. 189.)
 To James Finch, (Min. 191.)
 And Joseph Thornton, (Min. 194.)
207. The Pastor reported that Jane Seymour, James Finch, and Joseph Thornton, were admitted to the Lord's Supper, Sept. 7, 1834. (Min. 206.)
208. Reports received, from Districts,
 No. 7, By Brethren Curtee and Wilkin.
 No. 3, By Brethren Johnson and Freeman. (Min. 205.)
209. Reports received from the Committees,
 1. Of the Sabbath School.
 Admitted in the last quarter, Boys 26; Girls 20,—46.
 On the Books 240; in attendance 224.
 2. Of the Tract Society.
 New Families visited in the last quarter, 15.
 Now in Visitation, 201. Visitors employed, 13.
 &c. &c. &c.

No. V.

The registry of the church members should be kept in a separate book, committed to the care of the deacons; it should be ruled in spaces for reference to the minute in which the member named was either admitted, dismissed, excluded, or reported to have died. This should be well bound, and sufficiently large to last for many years.

Names.	Admitted.	Dismissed.	Excluded.	Deceased.
Jenkin, Thomas,	1812, min. 34			1814, min. 100
James Smith,	1814, min. 94	1815 min. 170		
Andrew Jones,	1814, min. 110		1815, min. 175	
William Sandford,	1815, min. 180			1830, min. 300
James Finch,	1834, min. 207			

No. VI.

District No. 4, Mile End Road, &c.

The visitors should have a copy of the names and address of the members residing in the district to which they are appointed. They will then correct all the inaccuracies they find in it, and return it when they make their report. This will enable the pastor and deacons to keep a correct list of the members in actual communion.

1	Danford, John.	10 Aldgate High Street.
2	Bligh, Samuel.	96 Stebborn Terrace.
3	Ostou, James.	10 Devonshire Street.
4	Renshow, Sarah	5 Globe Road.

Every minute book must be dated in the title-page, commencing January 1812, and ending June 1815. The reference in the register will then enable any one

to learn all the particulars of each member with ease, by turning, first to the title-page, and then to the number in the margin of the minute-book.

Since the visiting book will have to be renewed as the members change, and remove their residence, a common pocket account book will do very well for that purpose. A separate entry should be made for the members residing in each district, with the address attached to each name.

No. VII.

*Remarks on the Voluntary System, considered
in relation to its Spiritual Importance.*

It ought to be regarded as one of the happiest results which have followed the circulation of divine truth, that the moral necessities of mankind have been brought more perfectly to light, and laid more seriously on the hearts of Christians, than they have ever been before since the time of the reformation; perhaps, since the days of primitive Christianity. In our own land, so ostentatiously called Christian, it is now admitted, that even the most liberal view of divine doctrine, will deprive us of all hope respecting the great body of the people. The prevalence of gross vices is awful. In many cases the effect of religion is very limited, even where the hope may be entertained of its sincerity. On those spots in this favoured land, where the light of truth shines brightest, there are many still who sit in darkness, and are perishing in sin. The Heathen nations are in a still worse condition. The horrid gloom which covers them, stains with black the largest, by far the largest portion on the

habitable globe. Every few years the people which inhabit this mighty space, are swept away and numbered with the lost. The cry which issues from the dark abyss is awful: and it has been so far heard, that many have been forced to inquire how they may extend the blessings of grace, and save them from sinking into wretchedness in eternity.

The English nation has never appeared to so much advantage as in this great work of mercy. Its prowess in arms, and its skill in the arts, sink into littleness when compared with the moral heroism, and achievements, of its Christian philanthropy. Experience has now proved that its professions are not vain, and that its spirit is not superstitious. The constant action of divine principle has given a serenity and constancy to the work, which is always indicative of health. Though the first proposals of each society have been executed, and followed with enlarged designs, until the insignificance of its origin is lost in its present greatness; yet there is no reluctance in the people to supply the demands of the most extended exertion. Nothing limits the movement but power. At least so it should seem. And, hence, the question respecting the

best means of obtaining a supply of pecuniary support, is pressed with earnestness, and studied with an intense interest, by all the agents of every denomination in the church.

In order to solve this great problem, two parties have appealed to two very different sources. One has fled to the "HELPING HAND OF GOVERNMENT." The other appeals to the judgement of every man's own conscience. If an unbeliever refuses to support religious instruction for himself and others; in the first instance, his goods are seized, his person is incarcerated, and the "helping hand of government" compels him to submit by the use of physical violence: in the second case, no dependence is placed on any other help than that which is supplied by the force of truth, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

If the authority of divine law be claimed for compulsory exactions, it is quite sufficient to inquire for the document. Where is the written testimony? The divine law enforced by an appeal to conscience, and the final judgement, has been shown in the foregoing pages. But the divine authority for taking the act of vengeance into our own hands, and for exacting the support of religion by legal violence, can

never be shown, neither from the Old Testament, nor from the New.

This fact applies as much to the multitude as it does to the few. Whether it be done by a man, or by a nation, it is not authorized by God. That which he commits to us is the duty of prayer, of affectionate persuasion, and of personal devotedness to his will. These will secure the blessing of Jehovah, and by this the church will triumph. Faith depends, not on "the helping hand of government," but on God.

That this is the most effective means for diffusing religious instruction, for establishing religious worship, and for converting souls to God is clear, since our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to employ it alone in the establishment of his church; when his apostles were sent forth, they had no helping hand of government on which to lean: their devoted piety produced an effect which human legislation never could secure: the love of Christ carried them away. Nothing earthly could prevent their success, because they were guided and supported by the powers of the world to come.

It is not a problematical question, whether the power of divine truth be sufficient to secure

its own support: for, by the devotion which it awakens, has every great reformation been effected. Luther, and those in our own land, who will ever be revered as coadjutors in this undertaking, were led into the work by truth, and the power of divine grace. To the influence of these we owe the existence of Sabbath schools, and the splendid institutions that adorn and invigorate this nation. To these also must be attributed the partial return to activity in the established church: this is not the effect of its compulsory exactions, it proceeds from the piety and devotedness of its own members, awakened through the energy of other denominations.

The experiment has been made with quite as much completeness on the other side. Compulsory exactions have been levied from time to time to advance the spiritual welfare of the public; but they have never produced their intended effect. Where they have prevailed the most extensively, religion has had the smallest influence: where they have not existed, religion has gained its noblest triumphs. The attempt to support religion by compulsory exactions is, therefore, an absolute failure, and

ought, even on the principle of expediency, to be abandoned.

Such a failure will not be surprising, when the moral disadvantages of the system are considered. For, if those public and private wrongs which are designated grievances be passed over, one will remain more grievous than all. The character of the Christian minister is changed. His generous devotedness and trust in God are dishonoured. Instead of sustaining the place assigned him amongst the benefactors of mankind, he is made a party in an imposition which, to say the least of it, is regarded by many as unjust. The severity of prosecution, without any regard to the injustice of the claim, would be fatal to his merciful undertaking : but the questionable ground on which it is sustained is an irreparable injury. About four years since, a pious clergyman whose family was poor, and his church crowded, was induced to enforce a very trifling demand, or two, by actions at law. He gained his suit : but from that time his church was forsaken, and his instruction despised ; so that he was compelled to hire persons to attend, and to assist, in conducting the ordinary service of the Sabbath.

The ordinary difficulties which attend the suppression of selfishness are not unknown. In the voluntary labours of the church, they have been met in every form. Partly from the imbecility of our nature, and partly from the desire of earthly rulers, to take advantage of every difficulty experienced by the subject for increasing their own authority, the helping hand of government has, in some cases, relieved the minister of religion from dependence on God for protection and support. To accomplish this, his salary is exacted by law. But the effect of such laws is fatal to their object, through their tendency to promote inordinate accumulations. By these the appeal to the human heart, in every case of generous devotedness, is turned into burlesque. Bishop Porteus is said to have looked with terror, on the vast accumulation of property which awaits the see of London. By fines on the renewal of leases, and actions in the ecclesiastical courts, it is reported that a silent stream of wealth flows into the coffers of that prelate, which is often not less than £1000 per diem. When those leases fall in, the funds of the bishoprick will be incalculable. The sums appropriated by other clergymen awfully expose them to the

charge of covetousness, and deprive them of all power when reproving it in others.

One effect of the compulsory system, seems, by a sort of miracle, concealed from pious men who become its advocates. The funds exacted by this means, professedly for the support of religious worship, are not devoted wholly to that object. The greater portion of them is sold like funded capital, and diverted to the use of laymen. The messenger of mercy is not benefited by this. The purchase of a living often proves a bad speculation, even in a temporal point of view. But the system of patronage by which it is sold, conceals the spiritual necessities of the empire, and is an inveterate evil which no law can cure. It must be extirpated. To the grossness of this sin, no testimony is needed in addition to our own laws against simony: to its extensive continuance, every passing day bears its blushing attestation.

Where divine grace has subdued the heart, the mere pecuniary injustice will be endured with patience, though not approved; but this is not the case with others. Many in the country regard the church no further than they feel the influence of its pecuniary affairs. If

there be some who love it because of what they can get by it, there are many who hate it because of what they lose through its demands. This mercenary love, and this corrosive hatred, are equally opposed to the claims of our holy religion. They combine in feeding the sinful passions. The first is kept secret by policy, the second by fear: until their united energy is sufficiently strong to dare the open conflict. Then it is clearly seen how little religion is benefited by compulsion; for greediness on one side, and resentment on the other, generate by contact a species of violence altogether of its own character. We have no words sufficiently strong to paint its odiousness. Infidelity herself turns away from it with shame, and blushes to confess that it is human.

This awful consequence, which must attend the religious coercion of unconverted men, appears to have been felt by many of its own advocates. Hence, every kind of contrivance has been adopted to prevent, if not its existence, at least to prevent its becoming fatal. The mode of exaction is changed as often as it becomes odious: and sophistry is used to conceal the nature of the demand. But the policy employed to sustain the compulsory system is worse than

the system itself. It is the poison of the asp, without which its sting could not be so very torturing. It involves many compromises of principle, and it employs in behalf of religion, measures which religion condemns.

It is this demoralizing influence of the system which gives it all its importance in the estimation of pious men. The loss of property is a trifle to those who have treasure laid up in heaven. Though it might seem to limit their labours for God; even this will be conquered by additional acts of self-denial. But, rending the body of Christ into separate parts, and filling those separated parts with inflammatory jealousies, are evils through which religion is dishonoured by her own advocates, her promises are deprived of their merciful character, and her overtures are rendered contemptible in the estimation of those she intended to subdue and save; they lie at the very root, therefore, and live on the very vitality of everything sacred in religion, and they never can be changed, they admit of no remedy, until the system which brought them into existence has been annihilated.

It is not amongst the vulgar only that these effects are to be traced. The remarks which

are often made in both houses of parliament indicate a dreadful state of feeling in reference to religion. The political journals are deeply tinged with the same sentiment. Both proceed from the unfriendly position in which they stand in reference to the church. The most difficult part of legislation, is that which comprehends ecclesiastical affairs. The most prolific source of periodical declamation, is supplied in the necessity for church reform. The subject is forced into discussion by every day's engagements, the difficulty connected with the compulsory exactions, and their direct opposition to every kind of respect, has so far prevailed, in many circles, as to render political courtesey unable to conceal the impatience with which this imposition and embarrassment are endured.

Some of the effects which result from the compulsory system are quite anomalous. For, though a certain class might value a system on which it subsists; it is hard to explain why another class should repose therein, which derives from it nothing but incumbrance and loss. And yet, such is the case with those who govern these realms. They have been misled so long, that they seem unable to preserve the peace without the employment of clerical influence. The

messengers of mercy are, therefore, reduced to the character of a police establishment, at the expense of not less than £6,000,000 a year. This is a gross absurdity, the demoralizing influence of which, cannot be too deeply deplored.

It is true that religion is essential to the welfare of every nation. But that required, is the religion of the heart. When governing the spirit by divine precepts, it becomes the light of the world, and the salt of the earth ; but subjected to earthly policies, this salt has lost its savour, and the light is darkness. Over that ruler who diligently labours in his own department, tracing with care the regulations of divine justice, and constantly trusting in divine mercy : religion extends a pure and invigorating protection like that supplied by the vault of heaven which encloses and ripens the vegetation of our earth : but the effort to control religion, and subject its influence to earthly purposes, involves the absurdity of a clown, who laboured to increase the fruit of his field by legislating for the stars, and commanding, by his ordinance, the dew and the rain. In those things which are ordained by God ; the interests of

nations, and of individuals, are all comprised in *obedience*.

These remarks apply, exclusively, to no particular party : nor to any peculiar method of compulsory support. The interest of every party is included in its own obedience : and the compulsory support of any is reprehensible. If it be done by direct ecclesiastical demands, it is an act of legislative injustice : if it be done indirectly through the grants of public property for supporting religion, it then amounts to a breach of trust ; for the parliament is elected for civil, not for ecclesiastical purposes. Hence the dissenters have resolved, “ that it is inconsistent with their principles to receive any portion of public property for the support of their institutions.”* They have done this when the proposal was made by their own friends in power, and pressed by their enemies who wished to conciliate them. By this, their principles are fully explained. Religion has at length resumed her right position. When perfectly independent of earthly governments, she will be respected for the blessings she confers : but the act of crouching for political favours, defaces all her beauty, deprives her of every at-

* Resolution of the Baptist Missionary Society, passed in 1835.

traction, and leaves her to perish in the shame and corruption of spiritual pauperism.

There are two facts not often referred to by writers on this subject which deserve particular notice : one relates to governments which seek the support of ecclesiastical influence ; the other, to those sects which seek their subsistence at the hands of government.

In governments, it is observable that the necessity for ecclesiastical influence increases as their corruption becomes more serious and oppressive. A just government needs no support from an unjust prostitution of religion : but an unrighteous government will purchase it at any price, because it is the only garb under which its deformity can be concealed.

The sects which seek their subsistence from government are always more urgent as their errors in doctrine or practice become more obvious. Some who are comparatively pure may have been drawn into the mistake ; but for the most part, purity of doctrine and practice secure to the church, through the blessing of God, a sufficient support from its own friends. This is more independent, more healthful, and every way more pleasing. Whilst enjoying this.

with all its exalting consolations, no church will be easily tempted to accept of government support; but when the fear of deficiency is produced by the loss of publick confidence, and a failure of faith in God; seeing that all hope must then vanish, it is not wonderful if the fallen sect should fly to the feet of men in power, and implore the “helping hand of government.”

No government has ever given its support to the church without exacting in return what was deemed at the time an equivalent. If Constantine sat as a catechumen in the church, and fed its bishops from the publick treasure, he did it because their influence was essential to the stability of his throne. Henry the Eighth would free the nation from papal oppression, and endow the church with national property; but he must be its head. The effect of each event was the same. Constantine and Henry both proved the nature of that equivalent which they required, by their attempts to control the appointment of her ministers and the services of the church. In the first case, this object was pursued with much policy; but in the latter, many advantages encouraged an open avowal of the object. But each involved the same prin-

ciple. By placing his church at the disposal of men, the Father of our spirits is insulted: the monarchy in which he presides is invaded, at that very point, where his honour is most solemnly proclaimed.

If no other evil resulted from this besides the corruption of the Christian ministry, that would be sufficient to provoke universal regret. The language of Bishop Burnet on this subject is full of that just indignation and grief, with which we might expect the heart of every pious man to be filled, when meditating on an evil so destructive to all that is sacred in religion. The whole of his "pastoral charge" breathes a spirit of dignified sorrow, as though he were conflicting a point of vital importance, with powers too mighty to be overcome. The zeal, and the discouragement, which diversified the labours of Leigh Richmond, point at the same calamity. Both these men proved that any new undertaking for God, had more opposition to overcome, and therefore required a greater supply of voluntary exertion to complete, when it entered a compulsory establishment, than it did when first originated in the world. The reason for this is as clear as the fact itself. Ministers who enter the church merely for the

living it supplies, are reproved by the generous exertions of voluntary labourers, and they meet that reproof with cold suspicion, if not with open resentment: the people on the other hand, receive the appeal to their liberality with impatience, because they have to pay twice over; once in the compulsory exaction, which is quite sufficient, and once in their voluntary contribution.

The glorious power of Christian generosity was never more fully exhibited than on this ground. For, at length, the voluntary institutions connected with the compulsory churches, have grown to real importance. These embrace, not the necessities of Heathen nations merely, they extend to the various requirements of home. When those claims are pressed, no one pauses to ask, whether the £6,000,000 per annum raised by compulsion, would not, if properly applied, be sufficient? The zeal which finds and proclaims the necessity, seems to create the supply: even where churches exist, because the gospel has not been preached by the incumbent, Christians in the establishment, have been ready to purchase the advowson, in order to secure an evangelical ministry.

The importance of authentick statistical documents is nowhere felt so seriously as it is when deciding the respective merits of the voluntary and the compulsory systems. It has been stated that not less than £6,000,000, are annually raised by compulsion, and that £2,000,000, are yearly added by voluntary contributions. It is very obvious to ask, therefore, whether £8,000,000 a year ought not to secure a more effective system of religious instruction, than that which is at present furnished for these realms? Should Ireland remain in its present state of darkness, and so many parts of England continue in their present moral destitution, with such a continual expenditure?

On such a subject it is scarcely right to hazard a conjecture. The parliamentary papers of 1812, are the only authority to which we can appeal for the comparative results of these two sums. This document was provided by the clergy, in order to justify their own request for the multiplication of churches. It is there stated, that the places of worship in which divine service is supported by compulsory exactions amount to 1933. Those supported by voluntary contributions are equal to 4038. The difference is 2105 places of worship supported by voluntary contri-

butions more than the whole number supported by £,6000,000 a year of compulsory exactions. This is not the whole result of the two expenditures. This census, includes such places only as have a population greater than 1000. In the rural districts, similar exertions are made by both parties. In addition to this, the £2,000,000 of free contributions support schools, colleges, societies, and institutions for foreign exertions and benevolence at home, the vigour of which has now conquered all opposition, and left their enemies no resource, but that of recovering their credit, through the advocacy of labours which they formerly opposed.

Since the year 1812, this all-subduing principle, has effected greater wonders still. The whole nation is concerned, and a correct statement of the facts ought to be obtained. The nature and extent of each voluntary effort should be defined. The annual increase should be shown for a number of years. From this might be seen the effect produced on the compulsory churches. The whole would demonstrate that the churches supported by compulsion must, before now, have sunk into total insignificance, had not the vigour of voluntary agents roused them to activity in their own defence.

The injustice of combining the two systems has already been felt in the national church. In the parish of Camberwell, there are three episcopal chapels erected and supported by voluntary contributions. These have more than once resisted the compulsory exactions of the parish church. The argument used on such occasions is, that they cannot in justice be taxed for the parish, because they are paying for their own instruction. The argument is invulnerable: but then it includes the case of the dissenters: and shows that however slow we may be, to redress the grievances of others, we shall not be backward to complain, when compelled to endure the like injustice.

When men begin to do wrong, God alone can fix a limit to their aberrations. From neglecting the interests of each other, they learn to be cruel and unjust to themselves. It is thus with the advocates of compulsion. They are placed in a dilemma from which they can never escape. If the voluntary labours of episcopalians be diminished, their whole community will sink into disgrace: by increasing those voluntary labours, the conflict for religious liberty will become increasingly violent amongst the members of the established church. The last result is most to be desired, because it will

glorify God, and advance the spiritual interests of mankind.

The church of Christ is one, and the interest of every part of it is the same. Whatever promotes the health and vigour of the whole ought therefore to be sought with earnestness by every member. Coincidence in opinion cannot be obtained in this world, but generous co-operation is the duty of all. Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Independents, and Baptists, may all be united here, for Christ is the Lord of all. Let each one refuse to partake in the mammon of unrighteousness, and labour with simplicity to honour the Redeemer, then shall their light shine forth with brightness, and their glory as a fire that burneth.

God has directed this momentous question to the eve of some mighty result. All the elements of society are in motion, and the question is, where will they rest? Within the last two years, an advance has been made in publick opinion which, when predicted, seemed totally chimerical, even to the advocates of religious liberty.* But the prodigy has come, and it still moves onward. The people of England have asked for the entire deliverance of religion from all political restraint, and

* See the Author's letter to Lord Henley, on Church Reform, page 61. Published in 1832.

from all compulsory incumbrance: and they will ask again until they get it. The change which it involves is extensive and momentous. The compulsory system has twined round the fabrick of the state, as the ivy clings to an ancient building, until its removal, appears to some, fraught with terrific danger. Such a dread might be consistent in reference to any other government than our own. This, with all its imperfections, has now so much of justice in its constitution, that nothing can materially diminish its strength, but the continuance and growth of those excrescences, which are contrary to its nature, because they are opposed to the law of God. To remove these, must from necessity be painful; but patient submission to the will of heaven will render the process altogether innoxious.

All our real danger consists in our liability to forget God: for, if he be honoured, his providence will preserve whatever, in any, may be pleasing to himself. Perhaps the transforming influence of his discipline will be felt by all: increasing their knowledge and purity, and removing their several imperfections. For such a dispensation there is great necessity in every department of the church. To invite and facilitate, its advancement, therefore, is a duty in-

cumbent upon all denominations. In this they should unite with all the prayerful affection they can command. In this they may be zealous without sin, and emulate each other without jealousy.

But great care must be taken by all, lest those duties which are imposed by God should be adopted as matters of policy. They are beneficial, and their benefits reward the piety which observes them: but that piety must be simple and sincere. With this, the felicity of all is united: and all should combine in its culture. Every section of the Christian church has acknowledged its own necessity here. The people thirst for the comforts of religion, and enquire after her boasted victories. Ministers of all denominations become discouraged, sink into disease, and some in death, through the labour and anxiety of publick exertions. Still the number of converts is comparatively small; and the productions of grace, are stunted, and dwarfish. By some dreadful hand, the great salvation has been stripped of its vast magnificence. Meanwhile, by different parties in the church, reproach is thundered at each other in the name of God: and violations of charity and truth are mingled with their solemn benedictions. These things reveal a want of piety: and can be re-

moved only by its cultivation. Hence, when any effort to increase it, disturbs the ordinary indifference, and presses against the restraints of custom, the cry of fanaticism is raised ; not because good men are averse to its increase, but because the enemy of souls, would, by this artifice, divert them from the fountain of their mercy. He will keep them employed in conflict ; but every attempt to unite them in supplication, he defeats. This cold and heartless policy has been too long successful. It is time that all good men united in its defeat. The name of an exercise is not important, but combined intercession should be made in season, and out of season ; that the Spirit poured out from on high, might finish the conflict of parties in the church, by producing the fervour of brotherly affection. Such assemblies, composed of all parties, supplicating in freedom, forgiveness for the past, and direction in future ; would, if obtained, exalt every cathedral in these realms : for God would certainly be there : and the utmost limit of the habitable globe would rejoice in his benedictions.





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